



## **IRAN'S QUEST FOR ACQUIRING NUCLEAR CAPABILITY**

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### **Introduction**

Iran lying in Western Asia is bordered by Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to the north, by Turkey and Iraq to the West by the Persian (Arabian) Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the South, and by Pakistan and Afghanistan to the east. Iran was called Persia until 1935. Iranian Revolution in 1978-79 uprooted the monarchy surviving there for a long time. After the ouster of the King Reza Shah Pahlavi, on 1 April 1979 Iran was declared an Islamic Republic. Iran ranks among the world's 15 major mineral-rich countries. It is producing 62 types of minerals and industrial metals though in small quantities.

Iran possesses seven percent of the world's oil reserves and its almost seventy million people have a long history. Iran's development has shown remarkable resilience. Despite the turmoil surrounding the establishment of its revolutionary government, devastating Iraq-Iran War 1980-88 has made unprecedented economic development after establishment of Islamic Republic.

It is said that “Military preparedness has always been an important aspect of Iranian response to the multidimensional threat to its systemic security.”

During the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi military resources of the country were geared not only to protect him from the possible opposition but also to enhance his personal power and glory. It was mostly meant to ensure security from internal threats firstly and the external threat secondly. Iran acquired huge weapons like new supersonic F-5 planes in 1965. Moreover it placed orders for F-4 planes, HAWK missiles, M-60 and Chieftain Tanks, destroyers, frigates and hovercraft before 1967, well before Wilson’s East of Suez declaration. After the election of Richard Nixon as the new American President there was growing warmth for acquisition of arms and coincidentally Nixon was an old friend of the Shah. The Shah visited the USA in June 1968 to obtain more arms. The Shah’s visit to Washington was successful and the State Department and Defence Department had agreed to the sale of arms worth \$ 600 million to Iran. It was revealed by the joint communiqué signed on 12 June 1968. Soon after the Shah’s visit it was announced that Iran would get the F-4 Phantoms though the USA too needed them badly in the Vietnam war. In view of all these developments Iran emerged as the

dominant power in the Gulf by the end of 1971 which coincided with the British withdrawal and the Iranian regime began to think of enlarging its so-called security perimeter. The Shah of Iran in an interview on 15 January 1972 said that Iran would carry out its defence build-up into the Gulf of Oman in view of the developments in the Indian Ocean.

Iran at that time was considered an element of stability in the Gulf which was a crisis area. In view of external threats the Shah focused his attention towards Iran's nuclear policy vis-à-vis its military strategy. The nuclear programme of Iran began in March 1957 when Iran and the USA entered into an agreement for cooperation in the civilian use of nuclear energy. However, this nuclear programme to utilize nuclear energy as a source of commercial and industrial power began soon after the oil price-hike in October 1973. In pursuing the programme, Iran contacted France, Germany and USA to supply nuclear power plants. They did a planned target of generating about 23,000 MW of nuclear energy by the end of the 1990s. In this respect the cost involved was estimated at \$ 27.6 bn. Some others quoted as \$ 126 bn, to provide 52 percent of the total energy requirement. The Shah paid a visit to France in June 1974 and ordered for five plants, however, the French firm gave a firm commitment on only two of them. In July 1976 the Germans agreed to construct two

plants at Bushehr and to supply nuclear fuel for 10 years. The US-Iran agreement was reached in 1975. However, several obstacles were put in the final implementation of the deal by the US Energy Research and Development Administration. Keeping in view the limited quantity of oil reserves there was need for the long term industrialization and modernization.

Reza Khan, a military commander had himself crowned as Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1926 who ruled Iran till 1941 when he abdicated the throne in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah who ruled Iran from 1941 till 1978. During his reign he acted as absolute ruler and suppressed all his domestic opposition through the use of the internal security force SAVAK (Sazmane Ettelaat va Amniyat-e-Keshvar).

After the ouster of the Shah, Islamic Republic was established on April 1, 1979. As during Shah's regime United States extended full support to the Shah. Because of this, the United States after revolution in Iran was branded as the "Great Satan". The Soviet Union was considered as the "Lesser Satan." After the revolution and establishment of Islamic Republic both capitalism and socialism were condemned as materialistic systems which tend to dominate the Third World. United States became the target and accordingly group of Iranian militants seized US embassy in

Tehran and took the American diplomats as hostage in November 1979. This was a turning point in the deterioration of Iran's relations with America. The USA and the West have apprehensions that Iran is engaged in making nuclear weapons but nobody is sure how close is Iran in building an Atom Bomb. The British SIS and the American CIA continue to blame that Iran is achieving nuclear weapon's capability but they cannot say how far Iran has gone in achieving nuclear weapons capability. If Iran continues with its nuclear program with the same pace the day is not far off when Iran would make nuclear bomb.

Iran was already a signatory of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. In view of the limited quantity of oil reserve they thought the nuclear energy would be the first supplement and it would subsequently replace oil. In respect of construction of the nuclear power plant there was dearth of trained personnel to handle sophisticated technology. In view of this Iranian power plants would have been dependent upon foreign skilled labour. Moreover Iran was bound to import nuclear fuel at the price fixed by the West. Washington Post of 12 October 1975 reported that Iran was about to sign an agreement to purchase about \$ 700 million worth of Uranium from South Africa. Iran was to help South Africa economically in the construction of a huge uranium enrichment plant to be built in South

Africa. The reason which prompted Iran to support South Africa was to break the monopoly of the USA on enriched uranium for power supply. Iran also started making hunt for uranium in the country and it was helped by the French Atomic Energy Commission in the survey for uranium in Iran. It was reported in February 1971 that deposits of uranium were found in Kerman, Khorasan and Isfahan regions. In March 1976 the Iranian Atomic Energy Commission announced that uranium deposits were found in Kavir in northern Iran.

Besides this Iran also tried to train personnel in the field of nuclear technology. On 21 October 1975 it was reported that Iranian nuclear scientists would be trained in UK under a 30 year agreement at the Harwell Atomic Energy Research Establishment. They had also planned to invite scientists from Harwell to establish an atomic research centre in Iran. Iran's nuclear programme at that time was handicapped because of lack of adequately trained personnel and potential constraints like full-scope safeguards that were being demanded by its allies before Iran could have only nuclear power plants and fuel rather than acquiring nuclear technology. Regarding the acquiring of nuclear technology and the French deal a Pakistani expert observed "Since the development of nuclear power involves the processing and production of certain materials which

would be used in nuclear explosives, Iran by deciding to pursue a peaceful nuclear programme has in fact kept open its option to go nuclear.”

Shah, in an interview said “we have not only national and regional responsibilities but also a world role as guardian and protector of 60 percent of world’s oil reserves,”

It was usually believed that Iran might acquire the reprocessing capability by the mid eighties. During the Shah’s regime Iran was signatory to the non-proliferation treaty and also the prime mover of the General Assembly resolution in 1974 to declare the Middle East as the nuclear-weapon-free zone.

The Iranian revolution surprised the world. There was no secret about the mounting public discontent against the Shah but there was nothing to imagine that regime would collapse within few weeks. Neither the American nor the Soviet government found time to protect the Shah.

If Iran continues its nuclear programme with the same pace, day is not far off that Iran would conduct its first nuclear test. For the last two decades Iran has been going ahead with its nuclear programme. It is believed that Iran’s uranium enrichment programme is more advanced than it was previously suspected. It is thought that Iran may be only few years away from being able to produce enough highly enriched uranium to make

a nuclear weapon. Iran's plutonium programme is said to be less advanced than its uranium programme. It is said that there are at least four known facilities currently planned or under construction. When these facilities come to completion Iran is bound to manufacture material for use in nuclear weapons. The IAEA even after inspection has not come out by "correct, complete and final picture of Iran's past and present nuclear programmes. They blame Iran to have been engaged in covert nuclear activities during the last two decades. The head of the nuclear watchdog organization, Mohammed El Baradei has not come out with clear report of Iran's stage of nuclear enrichment programme. In case UN Security Council decides to impose possible sanctions there is strong possibility that three of its five permanent members France, China and especially Russia may be likely to veto any thing that might affect their commercial interests. The Iranians continue to claim that it is their perfectly legitimate right to enrich uranium. No country can be prevented from enriching uranium as long as it is done under safeguards. Mohammed El Baradei has already had high level talks with President Bush in Washington on March 17, 2004. Iran claims that its programme is for peaceful purposes. There are rumors that Iran might have completed construction of its first fissile device and it may be preparing for a test. Iran claims to have complied

with all the IAEA's demands Hasan Rowhani, the official incharge of Iran's nuclear programme criticized Britain, France and Germany for not defending Tehran's views at talks on international inspections.

The IAEA had adopted a tough resolution in which question was raised over Iran's failure to declare its possession of certain equipment and material. It was said that the said equipment and materials could be used to make nuclear weapons. Satellite images have been taken of the Natanz and Arak towns lying in South of Tehran which reveal much as to what is going on there in these towns. Following the September 16, 2004 BBC report about the Parchin base complex southeast of Tehran, it was said that this complex could be used to test the atom bomb components. Moreover at Arak there is a nuclear related heavy water plant. There are reports of massive Natanz facility relating to uranium enrichment plant coupled to a centrifuge facility. The work being conducted at Natanz and Arak might be related to the production of nuclear weapons. It is said that traces of extremely highly enriched uranium have been found in Iran, of purity for use in a nuclear bomb. In preliminary search in 2003 the Agency was supposed to have found "weapons grade" traces with a high degree of enrichment. Iran's defense Minister, Ali Shamkhani disclosed on March 10, 2004 that the Iranian military had produced centrifuges to enrich

uranium. However, he claimed that these were strictly meant for civilian purposes.

In March 2004 Iran disclosed that it had conducted a successful test of its much-vaunted Shahab-3 missile. The Americans believe it can carry a one-ton payload over a distance of thirteen hundred miles. The disclosure of Shahab-3 and the size of its payload imply that the missile could carry a nuclear war head. Americans have been accusing Iran of being involved in a clandestine nuclear weapon programme. They say that Iran was developing a uranium mine, a massive uranium enrichment facility designed to house tens of thousands of centrifuges as well as a heavy water production plant. It is accused that such facilities could support production of highly enriched uranium and plutonium for nuclear weapons. However Iran claims that its nuclear program is meant for peaceful purposes. It was during the mid 1980s that Iran was driven to build nuclear weapons because it feared that its neighbor might be doing the same. Iran was driven to produce the weapons to prevent itself from annihilation. Iran also made attempts to buy highly enriched uranium and plutonium from the East European market. In September 2004 two men with Iranian connections were arrested in Bishkek capital of Kyrgyzstan. They were trying to sell a large amount of plutonium on the black market.

The said radioactive material was packed in sixty containers. It is learnt that Iran has been shopping for nuclear know-how and has recruited foreign specialists for its WMD research and development programme.

A considerable number of South African scientists were formerly working in Iran. It is suggested that on October 20, 1992, following the collapse of the Soviet Union about fourteen Russian nuclear scientists found employment in Iran. Nearly fifty engineers and two hundred technicians concluded contracts with Moscow.

It is learnt that “on the nuclear side, research has been taking place at various locations. The IAEA knows of some of them, including the Tehran Nuclear Research Centre (TNRC) which includes hot cells located in the Jabr Ibn Hayan Laboratories, the Natanz site (much of it underground, raising an altogether different set of questions), Karaj, Lashkar Ab’ad, the pilot plant for laser enrichment, the heavy water facility at Arak as well as the Esfahan Nuclear Technology Centre (ENTC).”

Khatami’s election to the Iranian Presidency in mid-1997 created hopes for rapprochement with US relations. There appeared hopes for an improvement in relations with the USA and other Western countries. In December 1997 Khatami expressed his desire to undertake a thoughtful

dialogue with American people. The US President Bill Clinton had made it clear that the USA would not require Iran or any other Islamic State to modify its attitude towards the Middle East peace process. Efforts were continued to be made towards cautious rapprochement. Khatami addressed the American people through a US television network. In his address he emphasized on need for developing close cultural links with the USA. His speech was taken as a compromise between “moderates” and “conservatives” in his administration. However, in July 1998 when Iran test fired a new ballistic missile, Shahab-3 it caused a renewed tension in Iran’s relations with US. The Shahab-3 missile is capable of striking a target at a distance of 1,300 km. The missile could target Israel and also US forces in the Gulf. Iran’s efforts of acquiring weapons of mass destruction remains a major cause of mutual suspension between the US and Iran.

It was in February 2004 that the IAEA reported that it had found evidence of undeclared facilities that could be used for enrichment of uranium. A resolution was adopted in March in which Iran was condemned for the secrecy of its nuclear activities. As a result of it Iran temporarily suspended the inspection. Later on Iran and the IAEA agreed on a new timetable for further inspection of Iran’s nuclear facilities. Iran

announced that it would suspend voluntarily all centrifuge construction. Thereafter Iran tested a long-range satellite launching rocket, Shahab-4. They claimed that missiles would be used only in self-defence. It invited much criticism of its programme by the West. UN Security Council asked Iran to immediately halt all its nuclear activities. However Iran rejecting UN demand discussed the matter in Majlis. The Majlis approved a motion urging the Government to continue efforts towards developing a nuclear energy programme. However following the talks with French German and British officials in Paris, Iran complied with IAEA demands and suspended temporarily its uranium enrichment programme. But Iran asserted that the suspension was voluntary and was not a legal obligation. Iran insisted that it had the right to attain nuclear technologies. In March 2005 the US Administration announced a series of incentives to Iran for persuading the country to suspend permanently its uranium enrichment programme. Iran dismissed the offer as being insignificant. The United Kingdom, France and Germany agreed on referring Iran to the UN Security Council. On 28 April 2006 El Baradei delivered a report to the UN Security Council. It was concluded that Iran had failed to comply with the 30-day deadline imposed by the Council to halt its uranium enrichment activities. It was mentioned that since Tehran had failed fully to cooperate with the IAEA

there was no guarantee that Iran's nuclear activities were purely peaceful. There were speculations that Bush Administration was planning military strikes against Iran as Iran was continuously flouting international demands for cessation of uranium enrichment activities.

The UN Security Council adopted a resolution No. 1696 on 31 July 2006. In this resolution serious concern was expressed about Iran's refusal to cooperate with the IAEA. Moreover Iran was warned that country could face possible sanctions if it does not halt its uranium enrichment programme by 31 August. Thereafter on 23 December 2006 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1737 in which series of limited sanctions were imposed on the Iranian regime on account of its non-compliance with the terms of Resolution 1696. Following the imposition of sanctions import and export of nuclear related technology and material by Iran were banned. It was further decided to freeze the assets of leading individuals and companies involved in Iran's the nuclear programme. Iran was also granted 60 days period to cease all enrichment activities to avoid imposition of sanctions. In January 2007 Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps conducted a series of military exercises to the south-east of Tehran. The missile tests were also launched in response to the US decision to send a second warship to the region. It caused much

concerns to Iran as they suspected that Bush Administration was preparing to launch a military strike against Iran.

Western sources reveal that Tehran will have developed the long-range Shahab-5 or Shahab-6 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICMB) Iran's current missile force is believed to have been consisting of between two to three hundred North Korean supplied Scud-B and Scud-C missiles with ranges two and three hundred miles respectively "Iran's latest tests of its intermediate-range ballistic missile had brought the country a step closer to developing a viable strategic threat, not only to Israel but to several nations in the Middle East that lean toward Western interests". "A CIA report reveals that during the next five years Iran is more likely to develop intermediate range ballistic missiles based on Russian technology before developing an ICBM. All assess that Iran could flight-test an ICBM that the same technology would be used."

All assess that Iran could flight test an ICBM that could deliver nuclear weapon-sized payloads to many parts of the United States in the latter half of the next decade, again, using Russian technology acquired over the years."