

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



April 05, 2015

A Major Breakthrough in Iran-US Nuclear Deal

The disputed nuclear enrichment program, Iran had initiated, has long been a bone of discontent and escalating suspicion between Iran and US, over the past decade. The stalemate of distant talks brought economic sanctions on Iran. Many efforts were exercised, leading to congenial solution of lingering dispute, rendered futile. Iran got ill with lengthened sanction that worst affected its economy and has to pursue financial relieves.

Iran and six world powers (Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany) agreed on the framework of a potentially historic deal aimed at curbing Tehran's nuclear drive, marking a major breakthrough in a 12-year standoff after marathon talks in Switzerland.

US Secretary of State John Kerry hailed a "big day", while Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said the drafting of a full accord would begin immediately with the aim of completing it by the June 30 deadline.

Iran suffered severe economic sanctions after emergence of clandestine uranium enrichment. Subsequent to sanction imposed on Iran over disputed nuclear program, large sum of Iranian assets, in US and European banks were frozen, exports were barred and currency devalued. It resulted in price hike, unemployment and inflation across the country. Consequently the deal plays foundational role reviving the economic uplift of Islamic republic of Iran. The suspension of the uranium enrichment above 5 per cent is considered to be a vital step towards easing of the western sanction imposed on Iran, which is agreed in the deal with the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany.

The framework, agreed between Iran and the West, raised hopes the deal could help stability in the Middle East. Kerry said Iran's stocks of highly enriched uranium will be cut by 98 percent for 15 years, while its unfinished Arak reactor will not produce weapons-grade plutonium. The Fordo facility, built deep into a mountain, will remain open; however will not be used for enrichment but for research and development. The deal will also see Iran reduce by roughly two-thirds - to 6,104 from around 19,000 - the number of uranium centrifuges, which can make fuel for nuclear power but also the core of a nuclear bomb.

US President Barack Obama welcomed the "historic understanding" with the Islamic republic after decades of hostility, but cautioned that more work needed to be done. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said the United States and the EU will lift all nuclear-related sanctions on Iran once the UN atomic agency has verified that Tehran has stuck to the ground-breaking deal. And the US said all past UN nuclear resolutions on Iran would also be lifted.

The deal was highly celebrated in the avenues of Tehran given hundreds of Iranians took to the streets of Tehran after the agreement was announced, with drivers sounding their horns in approval along the capital's longest street, Val-e-Asr Avenue. The deal for sure accompanies economic riches and deflation of its currency there in Tehran.

The incumbent president of Iran owns the credit for melting the decades long trust deficit lying between Iran and the West - it instead has installed a certain degree of confidence, more or less portrayed a pacifying image of Iran before the world. The deal has certainly won a major achievement for President Hassan Rouhani, who vowed, bringing the country out of battered relations with west and relieving tightened sanctions, during election campaign.

The great power of the world and the UN hope that the deal will make it virtually impossible for Iran to make nuclear weapons provided the two sides abide by their approval. Successful implementation of the deal could put Iran and the United States on the road to better relations after 35 years of animosity since the 1979-1981 hostage crises in Tehran. The deal asserted to cement the multilateral relation of Iran with West in general and US in particular.

Russia being the one of the proponent of talks leading to congenial solution welcomed the deal whilst hailing the deal as recognition of Tehran's "unconditional right" to pursue a civilian nuclear programme. Nonetheless, the republican in US and some allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia displayed strong reservations on the deal. They fear that if too much of Iran's nuclear programme is left intact; it will still have the ability to obtain an atomic bomb. Israel said it would increase the risks of nuclear proliferation and of "a horrific war", with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu telling Obama the deal "would not block Iran's path to the bomb. It would pave it" according to an Israeli spokesman.

Failure may set the United States and Israel on a road to military action to thwart Iran's nuclear drive and keep Tehran out in the cold on the international stage. France, which has taken a hawkish line during the negotiations, warned that sanctions could be re-imposed if Tehran does not fully keep its side of the bargain. Nevertheless, the UN chief Ban Ki-moon applauded the deal saying, "a comprehensive, negotiated solution to the Iranian nuclear issue will contribute to peace and stability in the region and enable all countries to cooperate urgently to deal with the many serious security challenges they face".

We should learn the world can be turned into safer place to live in, only when the disputes turning into discord are turned into agreeable and implementable discourse, potentially strong to install peace. The history of war reflects, peace can only thrive when its pre-requisites, like negotiations are supplied unconditionally.

Iran Reaches Historic Deal

By Dilawar Sherzai

There is no doubt in the fact that the race of nuclear weapons has brought human race to the brink of extinction and any careless action by any of the countries possessing nuclear weapons may mean a destruction that may never be compensated. In the contemporary international political scenario power plays a dominant role and it is the desire of this power that different states in the world have developed the most sophisticated weapons in the history of mankind and collectively they have the capacity to destroy the world several times completely.

Recently, there have been doubts and concerns regarding Iran's nuclear program and US has been striving to control Iran's nuclear program and stop it from making nuclear bombs. The controversies, in this regard, have continued for the last several years, and there have been different episodes, some showing prospects of agreements and others possibilities of war; however, the recent development has been phenomenal. On Thursday, April 02, Iran and six world powers reached an agreement to work on a broad framework for resolving their dispute over Iran's nuclear program. There are expectations that the step would lead to a final agreement most probably in June, wherein Iran would formally sign the agreement and would be then bound to follow it. As per the current agreement, Iran has agreed not to produce weapons-grade fuel and would allow international monitors to have enhanced access to its nuclear facilities.

It is the most remarkable achievement regarding nuclear talks by Rouhani government. During Ahmadinejad government the talks had come to a halt and Iran suffered economic isolation as the sanctions were imposed against it. Though the country is still suffering from the sanctions, the new government has been very clear about the nuclear talks since its very inception. It has not been conservative in this regard and has given every willingness to continue talks, and the current agreement is the result of the same.

European Union Foreign Affairs Minister, Federica Mogherini, said about the Thursday's deal, "Today, we have taken a decisive step. We have reached solutions on key parameters for a comprehensive future nuclear deal." She also added that Iran would not produce weapons-grade fuel and international monitors will have enhanced access to Iran's nuclear facilities.

Now the most challenging task is to follow the agreed actions in the agreement and reach to a final deal. There are many factions in Iran and US who do not see any sort of compromise welcoming and they would definitely make sure that the deal does not reach to its final phase. Moreover, Iran's rival Israel does not see the deal positive and Nathanyahu has already mentioned that the deal would threaten the existence of Israel and several other countries.

Mogherini also said that the sanctions against Iran would be terminated and the precise timing will be determined as the negotiators work out a final agreement. The timetable for the termination of the sanctions is a point of controversy as Iran wants them to be lifted immediately, while US is in the favor of keeping most of them in place until Iran follows the terms of the deal. It is important to see what sort of developments are made in this regard.

The main controversy regarding Iran's nuclear program started when in 2009, IAEA, through a secret document reported that Iran

possesses "sufficient information" to construct a nuclear device and had even worked on developing a warhead with the capacity of being carried on a missile.

However, the agency accepted that their information is not based on concrete proof. Later on, the IAEA chief ElBaradei in September 2009 commented in an interview, "I do not think based on what we see that Iran has an ongoing nuclear weapons program," and accepted that Iran's nuclear weapons development has been "hyped". Since then, the controversies about Iran's nuclear program have kept on rising and they are now very serious. On the other hand, there have been controversies about the raw material provided for these plants. There is ban now on providing Iran nuclear fuel rods; however Iran has claimed that it has the capacity to build its own rods. Iran continued to pursue its nuclear program even after many controversies and opposition. The ban on Iran has reached to the extent of banning oil business with the country. The European countries that used to purchase a considerable portion of Iran's oil have banned to import oil from Iran, which is Iran's main export.

Iran had depended on Russia and China for some sort of favor regarding its stand about its program and these two countries have backed Iran to a certain extent. Showing their dominant role in the region and avoid any sort of tension in Iran that may influence the region these two countries have been taking cautious steps.

United Nations Organization in this regard has been urging Iran for transparent nuclear program. Keeping in view the mounting pressure from international community, UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Iran under resolutions 1737, 1747, 1803 and 1929. Under these sanctions, there is ban on the sale of material and technology related to nuclear enrichment and ballistic missile development to Iran; restriction on dealing with Iranian banks and individuals and restriction on major arms systems to Iran and strict inspections of air and sea cargoes.

Apart from these sanctions there are certain other sanctions imposed by the US and EU including the recent oil embargo. All these sanctions are imposed because US and other major countries in the world doubted Iran's nuclear program and fear any sort of development of nuclear weapons in Iran.

Definitely all the capable countries of the world have the right to follow friendly and secure nuclear programs but it should also be kept in mind that there are many secret stories regarding the different nuclear plants in the world and they really pose a threat to humanity.

All the nuclear plants in the world must be made transparent and secret stories should be disclosed along with all the intentions and ambiguities. Strict check on all the nuclear plants in the world is necessary. That is only possible through IAEA but it should be given more strength and authority.

Further, it should not be biased and must not be politically inclined and above all must treat all the countries of the world alike as far as nuclear threats are concerned. Otherwise, stopping different countries from developing nuclear weapons would be really very difficult and the race of nuclear weapons may continue until the human extinction.

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Afghanistan's Foreign Policy on the Muslim World Conflicts

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

As the manifold crises in the Middle East are further deteriorating and Afghanistan trying to bring the Taliban on negotiation table, the Afghan government seems to be hastily repositioning itself to take new approaches towards its relations with the Muslim world powers. There have been rapid changes in the Afghan government foreign policies after the new national unity government came to power. Since then, the tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have seen a sharp fall and the two governments have set a new course of cooperation on the Afghan peace efforts. In recent months, Afghan officials have paid several visits to Pakistan and the Saudi Arabia.

As the Islamic State and Huthi Shias' wars are raging in Iraq and Yemen amidst tense rivalries between Riyadh and Tehran, according to the reports, President Ashraf Ghani has recently assured the Saudi Arabia of Kabul's support to the Saudi state regarding the new threats emerging in the region. The move by President Ghani was criticized by some in the politics and social media, suggesting the move as a shift from his predecessor's policy of neutrality towards the major powers of the Muslim world. The recent statement of the Afghan government regarding its support to the Saudi Arabia regarding threats emerging from regional conflicts including the Yemen conflict highlights Kabul policies towards the Muslim dominant players.

Afghanistan's tacit support to Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government of Abdul Rabbuh Mansoor Hadi which is at war with the Huthi rebels have raised questions whether there is a substantial shift in Kabul's policy towards the regional powers.

Other than the Islamic State threat in the Arab and Muslim world, the other face of the conflicts in Arab countries is the rivalries between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two Muslim rival powers. As the internationally-backed campaign against Islamic State in Iraq is going on, Saudi Arabia is unhappy with Iran's dominant presence in the fight against IS in some parts of Iraq. Elsewhere in Yemen, the allegedly Iranian-backed Huthis' rapid advances have prompted an air campaign against the group by a Saudi-led coalition.

Afghanistan has mostly been on the safe side in last fourteen years regarding the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalries in the Muslim world. In last thirteen years, the Afghan government managed to have friendly relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Despite being a mixed Shia-Sunni country, sectarian and religious divisions remained low and Afghanistan had supports of both countries in the fight against the Taliban insurgency.

The recent flare-up of Shia-Sunni tensions in the Muslim world and rise of Islamic State militants has worried many in Afghanistan. Some presence of the IS affiliated groups are confirmed in some provinces.

However, the government of Afghanistan does not seem to consider possible sectarian tensions in Afghanistan a substantial threat in the country as both the leaders and mainstreams of Afghanistan's Shias and Sunnis are almost unanimously against the Islamic State group's presence or any kind of Shia-Sunni divisions in Afghanistan. Despite some unpredictable challenges and the fears of possible birth of Islamic State group in the country, Afghanistan is one of the few countries who are not directly and so much directly affected from the recent years' rapid Islamic radicalization as well as the shifts in the Shia-Sunni balance in the Middle East and South Asia.

However, the new government in Kabul has not shied away from seeking closer relations with the Saudi Arabia. This is not necessarily meaning distancing from Iran given that the government of Afghanistan is making all the possible efforts to get help from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in starting peace talks with the Taliban. But taking sides in crises such as Iraq and Yemen, where regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia are involved, could be meaning leaning further towards the Riyadh which would certainly annoy Tehran.

The fact is that President Ashraf Ghani has chosen the path to swing more towards Saudi and Pakistan as he is seeking the two countries' support in making peace with the Taliban. Despite the tangible leanings; however, it is not merely to say the Afghan government is shifting its foreign policy towards the Saudi Arabia at expense of relations with Iran. However, the recent tacit announcement of stance by the president was not a right move as Afghanistan needs to stay on the safe side and remain friendly with both countries through close relations with both nations.

Iran has been one of the major donors of the government of Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. As previously, the government of Afghanistan needs to maintain the foreign policy of active neutrality towards the regional conflicts and the relations with the Muslim world powers. Based on such foreign policy, Afghanistan needs to promote close and friendly relations with the regional powers including Iran while it should ensure that no sectarian tensions through Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalries would emerge in the country in the future.

On the other hand, Afghanistan has its own woes. Taking side in crises like in Iraq or Yemen is in no way in interests of Afghanistan. As Afghanistan is seeking to kick-start peace negotiations with the Taliban, the government of Afghanistan needs to resolve the conflict through a broad understanding in the region including countries like Iran, India, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and Turkey. By taking side in the regional rivalries, Afghanistan risks increased proxy activities of foreign and regional powers in the country. And Afghanistan needs to avoid that.

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