



Iran's Strategic Outlook: Geo-Political Implications for the Region

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Abstract

A state's strategic outlook not only incorporates the challenges and opportunities for achieving its national interest but also identifies and utilizes certain strategic drivers that shape its policies that, in turn, formulate and feed into its strategic outlook. Ideology, historical experience, geography, and culture are some of the factors that can play a role in a country's strategic outlook. The study focuses upon Iran, which holds immense importance in the political and strategic realm of international politics. It has a central position in Middle Eastern politics. Whereas in the West, especially in the USA, is often described as an irrational, theocratic, and fundamentalist state that sponsors terrorism as an instrument of policy, yet a closer look at Iran's strategic thinking points to the fact that it is often not the case. The Iranian revolution, ideological rivalry with Saudi Arabia, proxy wars in war-torn region, distrust of the US are the factors Iranian strategic outlooks depends upon.

Key Words: Middle-East, Terrorism, Syria, Shia-Sunni Rivalry, Pakistan

Introduction

Iran's strategic outlook is a reflection of some complex factors, the ideology of Iran and The Iranian regime's perceptions of vulnerabilities to the regime; Iranian enduring national interests and the subdivision of Iran's regimes many groups. According to some analysts, Iran's strategic view aspires to shift a power structure in the Middle East by defeating US allies in the region. Iran labels its backing for "Shiite" and other Islamist groups as "sympathy" for the oppressed and claims that Saudi Arabia is fomenting sectarian strife and attempting to retain Iran out of regional politics. Iran's policies are intended to safeguard it against the US attempts to destabilize the country. Its foreign policy may be viewed as an attempt to boost Iran's international prestige or revive a sense of greatness akin to that of the ancient Persian empires. Iran used all of its foreign policy options before signing the JCPOA to

minimize the consequences of international sanctions on the country. Promotion of Iranian goals and principles by different means E:g Traditional diplomacy, proxy wars, and favoring friendly regimes in neighborhood.

The international community accuses Iran of supporting extremist organizations in order to exert pressure or retaliate against Israel or other regional adversaries of Iran. Iran's armed assistance for Shiite-dominated ally governments, such as Syria's and Iraq's, has prompted insurgency challenges from Sunni insurgent organizations by inflaming Sunni public animosity. Iran's strategic view is predominately focused on the Near East, especially US operations, allies, and activities there. Iran's foreign policies is in competition at numerous components interact at different levels; Iran's foreign policy appears to be aimed

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towards influencing the policies and actions of major powers operating in the Near East, either as friends or adversaries of US interests in the region, such as those in Europe and Russia. However, following Trump's threat to withdraw from the JCPOA, the Trump administration has provided additional hurdles for Iran.

Background

Iran holds a strategic geopolitical position in

the Persian Gulf. According to World Bank figures, Iran, behind Saudi Arabia, has the largest economy in the region, as well as the greater Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In 2016, its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was \$412.2 billion. In 2015, it was expected to have a population of 78.8 million people. Shahram ([Shahram, 2001](#)). Iran as the 4th crude oil producer and 2nd largest natural gas reserves in the world, makes it more valuable in international markets.



Source: Google maps.MiddleEast/Iran

Certain scholars and countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Israel, see Iran as a serious regional danger. However, it is important to emphasize that Iranian political and military leaders are apprehensive about external aggression and separatist movements that can be readily inflamed by outsiders. Iran's geographical location is unfavourable in terms of defense; it's flanked by instability in bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan, which share 972 and 935 kilometres of border, respectively. Iranian anxiety is heightened by a sense of isolation among Iranians, the majority of whom are Persians antagonistic to Arabs. Religious issues play a part as well. Sunni Muslims dominate the region, but Shia Muslims, who are considered religious rebels by Sunnis, make up the majority of Iranians. Iran also feels hemmed in by American allies Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, which is

understandable. On defense, many of Iran's neighbours, mostly Saudi Arabia but Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members also, spend substantially more than Iran, and the former cannot contest economically.

Turkey, the western neighbour of Iran, is also a NATO member is hostile towards Iran. Until 2003 Iraq, the western neighbour was ruled by Saddam Husain, the volatile dictator who was involved in 8 long years of war with Iran which later became a source of sectarianism and instability. Khuzestan, Iran's storeroom and home to the massive Yadavaran oil field, is located in the country's western region. To the south, the Persian Gulf and the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) US allies. The Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, both to the northeast, are riven by territory disputes. To the east, insecure Pakistan and unstable Afghanistan are home to a number of issues,

including illegal immigration and drug traffickers.

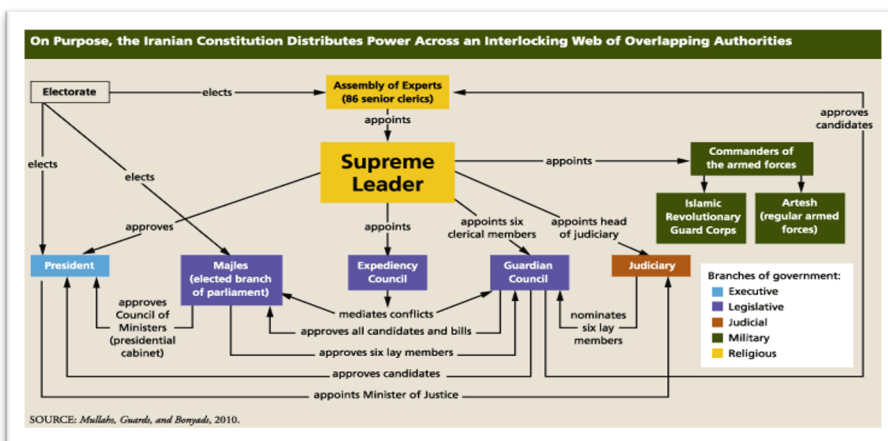
A key breaking point is Iran's unresolved disputes with the UAE, in 1971; Iran incarcerated over three strategically located small islands (Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunb). Although the likelihood of a conflict looks to be low, the likelihood of inadvertent and minor military clashes remains high. Iran is also concerned about Afghanistan's turmoil. Following the Mazar-e-Sharif incident in 1998, Tehran accused the Taliban of ethnic cleansing and thespian military exercises near the Afghan border in retaliation. . Illegal migration is currently one of Iran's most severe domestic challenges; the country is home to up to three million Afghans, a number that is rapidly increasing. Thousands of Iranians have been killed in Iran by extreme Sunni fanatics. Iran's deployment of massive ships in the Caspian Sea, where the political and military environment is dangerous, is also opposed by Azerbaijan. Iran's long coastline, which runs from the Persian Gulf to the Strait of Hormuz and out into the Gulf of Oman, not only demonstrates the country's strategic location but also provides it with a significant advantage if it chooses to exercise or demonstrate its naval might in the Gulf and Strait of Hormuz.

Iraq under Saddam Hussain, a main competitor in the Middle East, was considered the balancer against Iran by Middle Eastern, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council states. Since Saddam Hussain's fall and fragmentation of Iraq on sectarian and ethnic lines, Iran's

strategic significance has increased manifold (Keith & Lal, 2008). A number of observers are of the view that currently, Iran is playing a much greater role in the greater Middle Eastern politics, be it Yemen, Syria, Libya, or Lebanon. Since the fall of Saddam Hussain's Iraq, argues Vali Nasr, a Shia crescent under the leadership of Tehran, has emerged in the Middle East.

Key Decision Makers in Iran Strategic Structure

"Iran's foreign policy can't be understood without understanding Nizam ul Toosi's role in Mongol court. He perfectly depicts the Iranian pragmatism and smart choice. Moreover, he is of the view that Iran in the Middle East has approached people through soft power tools to enhance its influence that America neglected as it only relied on hard power". The four principal offices in charge of Iranian foreign policy are in hierarchy the Ayatollah (the Supreme Leader), the President, the Head of Expediency Council, and the Foreign Minister are, according to the Constitution of Iran. Following of these offices' foreign policy responsibilities, Leader of the Supreme Court: The Council of Experts overwhelmingly elected "Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei" to the title role of Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution on June 4, 1989, replacing Imam Khomeini, the Islamic Revolution's founder. The most definitive person in the important matters of foreign policy-making of the republic is the Supreme Leader of Iran.



Source: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is another success of President Rouhani in His tenure, which was later abolished by presid4nt Trump on the pretext that under this deal, Iran emerges as victorious, and the USA, along with European Powers are at a loss In 2017, Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi was selected to the position of Head of the Expediency Council. The Iranian regime's Grand Strategy is designed by the Council, which also sets foreign policy guidelines. Former Iranian President Ayatollah Rafsanjani is now one of them. He promotes tight ties with Russia, China, and India within the framework of "Asian Identity." In the global economy, he also supports free-market exchange. Foreign Minister: Mohammad Javad Zarif, a former UN ambassador, is actively involved in establishing and maintaining bilateral relations with foreign countries. He successfully negotiated the

normalization of ties between Iran and the United Kingdom with the British Foreign Secretary in 2013. He also reformed the working of the Iranian Foreign Ministry office, lowering the number of Iran's representatives in embassies and consulate-generals overseas from 136 to 15 only.

Iran's Nuclear Program

Nuclear capacity is a convenient quick cut to strategic parity for the impoverished. Iran has drawn lessons from the Cold War. On its side of Europe, the Soviet Union possessed far more tanks and soldiers, but it didn't matter. The nuclear weapons of the United States created a power balance that kept the Red Army out of Western Europe. The Iranian regime's survival plan revolves around its nuclear program ([NSC press briefing for journalists, 2017](#)).

Table 1. Iran's Missile Arsenal

| Name of missile | Range | Official Statement | Technology-Based |
|---|--|--------------------|------------------|
| Shahab-3 Meteor | 800-mile range missile | operational | |
| Shahab-3 Variants | 1,200-1,500-mile range | operational | US |
| BM-25/Musudan Variant | up to 2,500 miles | Operational | North Korean |
| Short Range Ballisticand CruiseMissiles | 200 mile-range Fateh 1 C-802 anti-ship cruise missiles | Operational | Chinese-made |
| Simorghvehicle rocket Vehicles | 10Shahab-1 (Scud-b), fir-2 155 miles | ----- | Undeclared |
| Shahab-3 to deliver a nuclear warhead | Under consideration | ----- | Undeclared |

Iranian Conventional Capability

Iran's authorities have frequently warned that if they are attacked, they will respond militarily. Iran's forces are commonly thought to be incapable of defeating the US in a traditional conventional conflict, but they have the potential to cause major damage to US forces. Iran appears to be capable of repelling any potential assault from its neighbors, notwithstanding its inability to array a rigorous armed force over the borders or across rivers. Iran is able to demonstrate power in the region against the US and allied objectives in a variety

of ways. Rather than using military force, friendly nations and proxy troops are used. Iran's armed forces are organized into groups based on their duties and responsibilities. The Basij volunteer militia, which has been used to suppress domestic dissent, is under the supervision of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iran has launched warships into the Atlantic Ocean on several occasions since 2014, apparently to demonstrate rising naval might. Iran spends roughly 3% of GDP, or \$15 billion, on defense, which accounts for about \$300 billion in the national budget ([IISS Military Balance, 2016](#)).

Table 2. Iran's Conventional Military Arsenal

| Type of Forces | Number of Regular Forces | Revolutionary Guard Corps | Military and Security Personnel |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ground forces | +350,000, | 100,000 | Total 475,000 |

| Type of Forces | Number of Regular Forces | Revolutionary Guard Corps | Military and Security Personnel |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Navy | 18,000 | 20,000 | |
| Air Force | 30,000 | Unknown | |
| Security forces | 40,000-60,00 | | |
| Basij | 600,000 | | |
| Tanks | 1,650 | | |
| ships and Submarines on Surface | 100+NorthKorea Russia | | |
| Combat Aircraft/Helicopters: | 330+ | | |
| Anti-aircraft Missile Systems | 150+ | | |

Making sense of Iran's Strategic Outlook

In International politics, every state follows a distinct strategic culture and holds a certain strategic vision and outlook that not forms the basis of its policies but also dictates its conduct in the achievement of its national interest. A state's strategic outlook not only incorporates the challenges and opportunities for achieving its national interest but also identifies and utilizes certain strategic drivers that shape its policies that, in turn formulate and feed into its strategic outlook. Ideology, historical experience, geography, and culture are some of the factors that can play a role in a country's strategic outlook.

Iran in the West, especially in the USA, is often described as an irrational, theocratic, and fundamentalist state that sponsors terrorism as an instrument of policy, yet a closer look at Iran's strategic thinking points to the fact that it is often not the case. Just like any other state, Iran's strategic outlook is based on certain factors:

Following are some of the factors or drivers that play an important role in Iran's strategic outlook

Persian Pride

While mentioning the country's advanced civilization and historic independence, Iranian leaders asserts the right to be acknowledged as a major power in the region. They compare Iran's history to that of the Gulf Cooperation Council's six kingdom federations (kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Kuwait, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman), the majority of which only obtained independence in the 1960s and 1970's. Iranians earlier known as the Persians are a proud people; *cream de la cream* of the world in relation to culture and

superiority. They considered themselves the continuation of the erstwhile Persian Empire that primed under Cyrus the Great and, at one point of time, was the mightiest empire in the world that for a long time overshadowed the great Roman Empire. The advent of Zoroastrianism in Iran coincided with the birth of Cyrus' empire ([Issawai, 1971, p. 40](#)). Alexander the Great, in 331 BC had defeated the Achaemenids' aged remains; the Parthians, on the other hand, only lasted 400 years before being replaced by Ardeshir, the first Sassanian King. Under his reign, Iran's science, art, architecture, and culture blossomed in a way that only their Achaemenid forefathers could match ([Issawai, 1971, p. 56](#)). In the 15th century, for the first time in Shia provided the foundation for Iran to express its national character. In 1501, Ismail, a youthful Shia sheikh, captured Tabriz and claimed for Shia Islam the entire land originally ruled by the Sassanids of Iran ([Irving, 1979, p. 157](#)). Ismail established Shi'ism the new dynasty's official religion, marching forward with his warriors wearing blood-red turbans and chanting, "We are Hussein's men, and this is our period." Persian authority reached all the way to Central Asia, leaving a lasting cultural imprint that may still be felt today. Tajikistan and Afghanistan speak Tajik and Dari nowadays. This Persian pride plays a significant role in its foreign policy decision-making. Take, for example, the case of nuclear weapons. According to the Iranian narrative, if India and Pakistan can have nuclear weapons in the region, Iran has equal right to have one, but the world in general and the West, especially the USA, is against accepting Iran's right to have a choice in its nuclear pursuit.

Islam, the Iranian revolution, and Israel

Iranian revolution based on Shia Islam and countering Israel is playing a role in Iran's strategic outlook. Between 1951 to 1953, the Shah's balance was briefly upset when Muhammad Mossadeq, Iranian Prime Minister, resigned as a dictator, bolstered by the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. In the early 1960s, Ruhollah Khomeini was exiled for resisting the Shah "ayatollah" representing his stature as an extensively regarded religious leader. In 1971, while the Reza Shah was hosting magnificent celebrations of the Iranian monarchy's 2500th anniversary, the activist clerics became revolutionaries. Iran's 1979 revolution resulted in the establishment of a Shia state. The Vilayat-i Faqih and the governance structure of Imam Khomeini are enshrined in the Iranian constitution. The President's powers are constrained by the Velayat-e-Faqih, or Supreme Authority. Even if he has widespread popular support, the President cannot undertake measures that are opposed by the leader or other prominent and important components of the Islamic system. Unless and until he has the support of the regime's powerful groups, particularly the Revolutionary Guards, the President could be relegated to the rank of secretary (Irving, 1979).

Shia Islam and Iran are said to be the same and one. Shia Islam plays a significant impact in molding Iran's decision-making elite's worldview. (Cook, 2005, p. 56). Iran considers itself the savior of all Muslims, especially Shia Muslims; hence it actively supports Hezbollah in Lebanon against its struggle against Israel. The Iran-Israel rivalry has grown so much that at present, Israel considers Iran as its enemy number one and is the strongest opponent to the Iranian nuclear program (Heinz, 1997, p. 28).

Israel: The Enemy Next Door

Iran cogitate that Israel is an oppressor of Palestinians and is illegal creation of the West, in contrast to the Shah of Iran enjoyed usually cordial affairs with the Jewish state. Israel, according to Khamenei, is a cancerous tumor that must be eradicated from the Middle East. Khamenei declared in a September 2015 address that Israel would most likely finish existing in the coming 25 years, the same time

frame for the JCPOA's nuclear restrictions to expire (CNN, 2017). The aforementioned findings support Israel's allegations that an Iran with nuclear capability would pose an existential threat to Israel and alleged Iran for providing substantial backing to groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, who have carried out deadly attacks against Israel as a form of pressure. Iran's authorities frequently claim that the international community unfairly punishes Iran; despite Israel's refusal to join Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and possessing nuclear technology it escaped punishment. Iran's authorities routinely refer to Israeli charges that Israel retains the possibility of striking Iran's nuclear facilities unilaterally, alleging that Israel's claimed nuclear arsenal is a major impediment to the formation of the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction. Not only Israel, but also successive US administrations have been concerned about Iranian assistance for anti-Israel militant groups. According to a report on terrorism by USSD "Iran provides funding, weapons (including advanced rockets), and training to a number groups, including Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command". The JCPOA's accreditation caused a rift between Israel and the Obama administration. Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime minister, labeled JCPOA as "historic mistake" in September 2017 and asked President Donald Trump to renegotiate or cancel US involvement in the deal which President Trump did so.

The Washington Factor

In Iran's historical memory, Washington is the country that has played a significant role in denying Iran its rightful role and place in regional and global politics. Be it the CIA planned and executed coup to overthrow Iranian Prime minister Mosaddegh in 1953 or American blanket support to Saddam Hussain in his decade-long war against Iran. According to the Iranians, the West in general and the USA in particular, provided Iraq the logistical support including the chemical weapons that he used against Iran. Again, it was the USA that without any provocation destroyed the Iran Air's airplane killing everyone on board in 1988.

More recently, post 9/11, then-President Bush included Iran in his "axis of evil." Trump's dumping of the US-Iran nuclear deal is another case in point. According to Iran, America's uncompromising support for the state of Israel is not causing problems in the Middle East but also is the main reason behind the current turmoil in the Middle East. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has claimed numerous times that the US has never embraced the Islamic revolution and is working to destabilize it by supporting domestic opposition, imposing economic sanctions, and supporting Iran's regional rivals.

He constantly warns against Western cultural impact on social behavior, which he claims contradicts Iran's society and Islamic norms. "Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has a strong suspicion of US intentions toward Iran," according to a report on Iran's military strength provided by the Department of Defense in January 2017. 2016 (fas.org 2016). Iran's officials claim that the United States' presence in the Persian Gulf region and other nations around Iran reflects a desire to intimidate or destroy Iran if it follows policies that are contrary to US interests and policies. (Slavin, 2014). US new administration seems to be under pressure from Saudi Arabia. Trump declared Iran as promoter of sectarian violence in Iraq and civil war in Yemen and Syria. President Trump alleged that Iran has not only condoned the Bashar al- Assad's use of chemical weapons but have also been supporting his atrocities. Trump termed the Iranian regime as a dictatorship and promoter of terrorism against America. (Whitehouse, 2017).

US is keeping a vigilance over Persian Gulf to ensure free flow of oil. It is also supporting GCC to build up common regional defense against Iran. US have been helping Israel against Hamas and Hezbollah who are supported by Iran. Under these arrangements analysts says closing eyes on Iran's nuclear program through an abrupt policy is not a good rationale choice for US, instead US should have chalked out a better strategy to check Iran's nuclear program. Iran has been exploiting the situation in Syria and Yemen. It supports Bashar Al-Assad in Syria and it's also supports forces in Yemen working against Saudi Arabia. Russian-Iran-Turkey has joined hands for cessation of

hostilities in Syria. At a recently held trilateral meeting, the Russian President said that due to efforts of three countries, the disintegration of Syria has been averted and hoped that long term civil war in Syria will end soon. (Nyttern, 2017).

Iran and Syria: A strategic Partnership

Iran and Syria have cordial relations for almost three decades since the coming of shia clergy coming into power in 1979. After the successful Islamic Revolution, Syria was one of the first few countries who openly supported the Islamic regime in its war against Iraq. The common hostility toward Saddam kept both Tehran and Damascus close to each other despite their different political and governance systems. Although, Syria is a secular state differed sharply from the Islamic Republic, a strategic partnership developed as a result of their common worldviews, similar position on Palestine issue and many other contemporary world issues. (Hunter, 2010, p. 207). Syria was one of just two Arab states that supported Tehran diplomatically and rhetorically during the Iran-Iraq War after the Iranian Revolution's victory. Despite the fact that Iran and Syria have quite different political systems, their equal support for Saddam Hussein's Iraq helped to keep the cooperation alive. Syria's governmental system, as a secular Baathist state, differs significantly from that of the Islamic Republic. Initially, Syrian-Iranian relations grew out of their shared worldviews and attitudes on the Palestinian question, as well as a variety of other international concerns.

The survival of a friendly Assad regime is important for Iran. Tehran will be the big loser if the Assad regime bows down which for the time being seems difficult. Iran has stood firmly on the side of the Assad regime throughout the crisis. Western leaders have accused Iran of helping Syria in brutally suppressing anti-regime demonstrators, although few of these accusations have yet to be proved. (Bakri, 2011). Syrian demonstrators have also charged Iran of providing support and standing with Assad regime by providing weapons to use against. Although Iran has provided assistance to the Syrian regime but Iran will go to the extent possible to support

the regime and probably will be the last country to pull its hands from supporting the Syrian regime for a number of reasons. First, the fear of a post-Assad Sunni regime that will be more tilted toward Saudi Arabia than Iran. Iranian leaders are also concerned about the possible rise of a pro-American government in Damascus [\(Sadjadpour, 2013\)](#).

Saudi Arab: Ever looming factor in Iran's Strategic Outlook

Saudi Arabia and Iran are fighting a proxy war that has spread throughout the Middle East. The tense relationship between the world's two most powerful countries. The interests of these two regimes have affected the changing political and sectarian dynamics in the Gulf, the political crisis in Lebanon, the long-standing Palestinian issue, the Syrian catastrophe, and the growth of extremism and terrorism in many other Muslim countries. Saudi Arabia and Iran both derive their legitimacy from religion, and both have lofty plans that will be difficult to implement. Their struggle is fought over two fundamental issues: 'values' and 'interests.' In terms of 'values and ideological problems,' their proxy conflict is centred on religious disagreements and their desire to rule the Muslim world. The term 'interests' refers to concerns such as the balance of power, regional security, US presence in the Gulf, and oil pricing, among other things. They utilise ideology as a front for pursuing other political goals. One of the essential features of Riyadh and Tehran's foreign policies, which has forcefully awoken a dormant Sunni-Shiite rift, is obedience at home and rebellion abroad [\(Freedman & Karsh, 1993\)](#).

Since the ouster of Saddam Hussein as a result of US attack, Iraq has been the central concern for both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both the states have tried to increase their influence in the country. Iran has been able to improve its relations with Iraq under Shia dominated governments while Saudi Arabia has not been able to develop its relations with Iraq like Iran. Saudi Arabia is worried about Tehran's close relations with Baghdad. The coming of power of a Shia dominated set-up in Iraq could easily create the environment in which Iran and Iraq could work against Saudi Arabia's interests and challenge its regional influence. Even a short-

term coalition could be greatly harmful for Saudi interests throughout the region [\(Whery, 2012, p. 80\)](#).

The Syrian crisis has turned into an Islamic insurgency. It is consciously projected in order to recruit the insurgents in the name of Islam for Jihad. Both pro-Asad and Anti-Asad combatants claim their loyalties to their sectarian god fathers most importantly Iran and Saudi Arabia. Support from the foreign countries and non-state actors have turned the situation into a bleak scenario i.e. Iran-Saudi roles and support in the crisis. The brutal handling of Assad to quiet the protesters has produced more opposition than cooling down the situation. Syrian soil has also been the battleground between Iran and Saudi Arabia for leadership of the Muslim world. The royal king of Saudi Arabia claims themselves to be the only custodians of the two holy Muslim sites, Makah and Medina, while the clergy in Iran claim to be the revolutionary leaders of the Muslim world. The Sunni-Shia division also shows itself in the conflict in Syria with Saudi Arabia standing along the Sunni opposition forces and Tehran close to the Shia Alawi sect adding a religious aspect to the Syrian crisis. While Saudi Arabia and Iran are the two regional weights and important.

Iran and Pakistan

Iran and Pakistan have had an unbridled relationship. Pakistan has supported Iran during the war with Iraq (1980-88), and early 1990's the two countries resumed significant military collaboration and cooperation is still going strong, as seen by joint naval exercises in April 2014. In the 1990s, however, a divide developed between the two countries, both countries supported different factions in Afghanistan as Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban clashed with Iran's support for Northern Alliance and Shiite Muslim minorities who opposed Taliban rule in the country. According to reports, Pakistan is attempts to restore Taliban rule in Afghanistan concerns Tehran. Two Iranian Sunni Muslim extremist groups, Jundullah and Jaysh al-Adl, are also active not only in Pakistan but hurts the Iranian interests [\(Lancaster & Khan, 2004\)](#).

The relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is a major cause of friction

between the two countries. After denying a Saudi's approach to join the coalition fighting against the Houthis in Yemen, but in December 2015, Pakistan joined "anti-terrorism alliance" a 34-nation Alliance led by Saudi Arabia. Despite the fact that the alliance was formed to confront ISIS, Iran believes the goal is to curtail Iranian dominance in the Middle East. Former Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, Gen Raheel Sharif, was named military commander of the alliance in early 2017, signaling a significant shift in Pakistan's behavior towards the kingdom. Experts consider that Pakistan's nuclear expertise will be a major source of technology for Saudi Arabia if the kingdom wants to get nuclear weapons to counter Iranian nuclear capabilities.

Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline was on major project which not only fulfill the energy need of Pakistan but also provide much needed economic aid to Iran as well. The line was meant to extend all the way to India, however India backed out of the project before it could be completed. In March 2013, then presidents of both Iran and Pakistan have inaugurated the gas pipeline. Iran has completed its side of the pipeline till its border, but Pakistan's economic problems didn't allow it to complete its side until China as part of CPEC agreed for roughly \$2 billion to build the side of the gas pipeline. IPI project was under sanctions by US Iran Sanctions, but consequently the project was waived off in order to implement JCPOA. President Ruhani during his 2016's state visit to Pakistan didn't get confirmation from Pakistan to complete, but the two countries agreed to continue cooperation on border security and to work jointly against terrorism in the region. ([Fazl-E-Haider, S. 2014](#)).

Recently, Pakistan –Iran and Afghanistan have developed convergence on fighting against terrorism, border security, and sectarianism. In addition, in recent years, Iran's

concerns about Pakistan's historical support for the Taliban have been addressed to a great extent. Pakistan has attempted to reach out to non-Pashtun Afghans while opposing the Taliban's return to power. Pakistan has expressed its concerns on growing Indo – Iranian relations and growing Indian presence in Iran since 2003, Indian espionage activities (kulbushan yadeve) are great concern for Pakistan

Pakistan, on the other hand, maybe concerned about Iran's involvement with India on a number of strategically significant Afghan economic projects.

Conclusion

The argument that put forward is Iran's strategic decision making is based on pragmatism and a clear understanding of Iranian national interest. To achieve this, Iranian leadership is willing to and has shown flexibility and rationality. To conclude, historical pride, distrust of America, quest for a leadership position in the Muslim world are the pillars or drives of its strategic outlook yet at its core, Iran wants to be taken seriously and regarded a serious and major player in global politics and to achieve this end, it is willing and has shown flexibility and pragmatism. Iran's overall strategic approach encompasses a range of coercive actions as well, i.e supporting terrorist activities and proxies, engaging in hostile maritime activities and exploiting psychological and information operations.. Iran's support for the Houthis, the Assad autocracy and Hezbollah forces in Syria, Shiite militias in Iraq, or attacks on Iranian vessels in the Gulf Ocean result in JCPOA's collapse. An revolt in Iran or any event that destabilizes the system might lead to policy shifts that support or harm US interests. Depending on the ideas of his successor, the Supreme Leader's exit from the scene could drastically alter Iran's outlook.

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