

IRAN AND REGIONAL BALANCE OF POWER (BoP) IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A GLOBAL SECURITY DILEMMA

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ABSTRACT

Arguably, United States became the universal hegemon from the mid-twentieth century to the present. The main obligation of a hegemon is to ensure global security and stability. One way a hegemon fulfils this obligation is to ensure that no single country accumulates excessive power compared to others within a specific region to avoid repeating the circumstances that led to the total breakdown of law and order in the past. The alternative way is to empower strong allies in all regions to rival and checkmate any power that could either oppose the hegemonic influence in any region or pose a threat to global security. Both ways refer to the concept of Balance of Power (BoP). These strong regional allies are often empowered in their regions to become secondary hegemonies that would collaborate with the primary hegemon to jointly maintain global order beginning from their respective regions. Findings indicate that United States has achieved this feat almost in all regions, except the Middle East, where it seems that to establish a strong hegemon remains problematic due to some factors. The first factor owes to a number of economic interests of United States and its allies. The second factor hinges on the nature of Islamic culture. The third factor is the escalated global terrorism that stemmed from U.S foreign policy towards the region over time. Further evidence reveals that the situation in that region has grown from being a problem to being a dilemma. Iran, a former U.S ally in the 20th century, completely lost that status in its region to Saudi Arabia and Israel in the 21st century. While the regional states can never accept Israel, a Jewish state as their leader, they are divided in opinion about the leadership of Saudi Arabia. The primary reason for the diverse opinions is the fact that Saudi Arabia, the headquarters of Islam, seems to have been liberalized over time, while Iran, on the other hand, remains the only official Islamic Republic in the Middle East which has firmly upheld Islamic tenets. The secondary reason is that other regional states have competing national interests. It is against this backdrop that this research will employ qualitative research methods to historicize and analyse Iran's potential emergence as a regional power in the Middle East, the security implications, and the reasons why it seems that regional hegemony for Iran is dicey but vital. Considering recent events in the region and beyond, it concludes with policy recommendations for achieving balance of power in the Middle East.

KEYWORDS: Middle East, dilemma, balance of power (BoP), vital, global security.

1. INTRODUCTION

Different nations in different regions of the world are endowed differently. In most cases, it is the multiplicity and the worth of a nation's endowment that translates into economic power. Again, the height of scientific or technological advancement of a nation determines the position of that nation in the community of nations regionally or globally. Such is the case of Iran, a country situated in the Middle East, which is assessed to possess the capability of solely developing into a regional and a global (super) power. In the recent past, Iran has made attempts to develop nuclear weapons which seem to be the main attribute of global power status. If not for the sabotage and intervention of other superpowers, Iran would have acquired nuclear capabilities years ago.

For many decades, U.S and the UN in particular, have made frantic efforts to create a level playing ground for the Arab nations in the Middle East, which seemed not to have yielded the expected result. The reasons for the failed efforts are not far-fetched. The fact is that Iran is not only rich in crude oil, but is also endowed with uranium, a key element in the development of nuclear weapons. Iran is also technologically equipped to make that a reality (1) According to the rightist jittery, a culmination of the aforementioned in the arsenal of a nation whose morality staggers with a huge question mark, could cause nations in that region and beyond to live in fear. Moreover, the fact that few nations in that region seem to be technologically and economically on par with Iran only heightens the complexity.

The United States' interference in the Middle East's politics of balance of power stems from its status as a global hegemon but its recent involvement in scuttling the nuclear ambition of Iran may have, speculatively, stemmed from the fact that Iran unapologetically became an Islamic state following the 1979 revolution; and the Islamic extremists who have been terrorizing United States and its allies could find in Iran, a front for terror activities and a haven for terrorists should Iran eventually become shielded under the strategy of nuclear deterrence. In the Middle East, only Israel is believed to have developed nuclear weapons with the support of United States since 1966. Although the nuclear forces of Israel are yet to be acknowledged, the fact that Israel got nuclearized increased Muslim-Arab restiveness and equally caused the strain of cordial relationship between United States and some Muslim countries in the Middle East. Iran, being the only officially declared Islamic Republic in the region, is not left out of this sentiment. From Iran's viewpoint, if the United States were not biased against Iran on religious grounds, Iran believes it deserves nuclear support, not Israel. Therefore, both United States and Iran have their respective concerns. The ruckus between the two countries is what this paper seeks to historicize in order to find a pathway between their respective interests which is key to resolving both global and regional insecurity which the Middle East dilemma presents.

Nonetheless, on the global stage today, United States has apparently succeeded in balancing power in every other region except the Middle East. More so, following recent events and Israel's recent adamancy on its high-handedness over Palestine and Iran, some U.S. key decision-makers may likely envisage a rival to Israel in the Middle East region to check Israel's excessiveness that could lead to an escalation of global threats. Secondly, Iran's president, Masoud Pezeshkian, during one of his speeches, maintained that Iran will be open to cooperation with all nations including revisionist states. He went further to warn that Iran, under his watch, will not respond to pressure from United States. (2) Against this backdrop, this research analyses the security implications of Iran's emergence as a dominant regional power in the Middle East.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF IRAN

Iran is an ancient country in the Middle East region of South Western Asia. Adorning its landscape are snow-capped mountains, green valleys and barren deserts dating back to about 2500 years to the days of Great Persian Empire, three times the size of France. The capital city is Tehran and Masoud Pezeshkian is the current President. Mojtaba Khamenei was appointed the supreme leader after his father, Ali Khamenei, was slain in February 2026 by the coordinated strikes of Israel and United States.. Iran was conquered by Muslim Arabs in 600 AD and was ruled by Muslim Caliphs for about 200 years. Two-third Iranians are descendants of Asian people called Aryans. Iran lies in Southwestern Asia, Northeast of Arabian Peninsula, facing the Soviet Union and the Caspian Sea on the North; Afghanistan and Pakistan on the East; the gulf of Oman lies to the South, while Iraq and Turkey borders Iran to the West. They speak Persian which is also known as Farsi and the area covers about 636,300 square miles; franchise begins at age 15. (3)

Reza Shah Pahlavi ruled as Shah from 1925 to 1941 and he was succeeded by his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. They were both dictators. The overthrow of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979 brought a revolutionary change from constitutional monarchy to Islamic Republic after which a new constitution along Islamic line was drafted. The constitution states that the nation's supreme leader must be Faqih who is a scholar in Islamic philosophy and law. This leaves Iran a theocracy, hence, the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) was the only political party recognized in Iran until its dissolution in 1987. (4)

3. BALANCE OF POWER (BOP)

Balance of power is a system of maintaining peace through an even distribution of military and economic power among nations or group of nations by forming alliance. (5) It is a military system which ensures that no nation within a given region has a military upper hand above her contemporaries within the same region in order to avoid one country exercising dominant or hegemonic power over others (except when sanctioned by the primary hegemon). According to Morton Kaplan who was a distinguished service Professor of political science at the University of Chicago, there are conditions necessary for balance of power to work and these include: increase capabilities but negotiate rather than fight; fight rather than fail to increase capabilities; stop fighting rather than eliminate a major power; oppose any coalition or single nation that tends to become predominant within the system; oppose any nation that subscribes to supranational organizing principles (that is one that promotes an ideology of subordinating nation-states to some higher authority); and treat all major powers as acceptable partners; permit a defeated power to re-enter the system as an acceptable partner or replace it by strengthening some previously weak power.(6) Other conditions necessary for balance of power may include political or ideological similarities among allied partners as well as nations within a given region being at same level of technology and affluence. This is where the problem lies. Although in terms of affluence, some nations in the

region like Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates can be equated to Iran, United States and Iran seem very distinct both politically and in terms of religious and socio-cultural ideology.

Conversely, there are conditions that can disrupt the balance of power in a given region. For instance, a state's capability may increase through rapid economic growth; technological innovation may occur faster in one state than other states especially when it bothers on production of potent weapons of mass destruction, and largely dependent also on which country spent more money on her military in terms of recruitment, training and acquisition of military hardware. Furthermore, changing economic needs may spur a nation onto extending its tentacles beyond traditional alliance to seek a wider market and with this comes new sphere of influence and ties which may be detrimental to regional balance of power especially when a nation unilaterally develops the afore mentioned capabilities without the sanction of the primary hegemon. For example, Israel's alliance with U.S gives Israel an edge over other nations in the Middle East while Iran's quest for a unilateral development undermines Iran's advantage. On this note, Iran's radical postures especially its attempt to join U.S rivals, Russia and China, in BRICS, could further disrupt balance of power in the region because Iran cannot be entrusted with such power by the primary hegemon. Equally important to note is the fact that, some big and defiant states will continue to grow big especially when efforts to restrain them failed a number of times. (7)

4. IRAN AND THE JOURNEY TO REGIONAL POWER

According to European Consortium for Political Research,
a regional power is a state [which belongs] to a geographically defined region, and dominates its region in economic and military terms; able to exercise hegemonic influence in the region and considerable influence on the world scale, willing to make use of [its] power and resources. (8)

In 1979, the dethronement of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran strengthened the stability of Islamic world. After the Shah whose regime was backed by U.S and U.K was ousted, a new regime known as Shi'it Islamic Republic emerged and was headed by a radical Cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who saw capitalism and communism as twin devils threatening the purity of Islam. (9) Before this time, there was increasing fear in the Arab world over westernization of the Middle East and the fact that the appetite that Western culture had aroused in the Middle East had refused to be doused. Though the Middle East had been in conflict with Christianity for centuries, it was not as threatening as the threat posed by Western commerce, communication, aids and grants and so on to the oil rich Middle East nations. With increasing outrage against the West, the Ba'ath Socialist Movement came into being and had a large radical ardent spanning from Iran, Iraq and Syria in the 1970s. The Ba'ath Socialists rejected popular sovereignty and demanded for the control of all aspect of the society through Islamic tenets.

The above stated can further be emphasized through a correlative dimension. For instance, if Russia and its Eastern allies back Iran's nuclearization, Iran might become a buffer for Eastside powers against the West and may create a universal imbalance in which there will be another super power at the center of the universe with opposing ideology against Western ideology even though its ideology is more of socio-cultural than the socio-economic ideology which has been a battle line between the East and the West. Emphatically, Arabian original cultural values abhor Western lifestyle and the religious differences only worsened the disparity of these separate cultures through extreme indoctrination which may have been necessitated through the politicization of the religions by the elites from the two cultures.

The oil boom of the 1970s gave credence to Iran's quest for regional leadership. The Shah was poised to maximize this opportunity to become a dominant power in the Persian Gulf. The oil wealth increased political powers just as it increased the desire for acquisition of more powers. At this point, the Shah understood that if he could have control over Arabian Peninsula, he would control world's oil supply. But the Shah had a foe on his path to monopolize the power dynamics in the Peninsula. King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia had same ambition as the Shah of Iran's and both nations were then allies of United States. Their clash of interest saw them waging a proxy war against each other in Oman. Faisal being deficient in his vision in the Peninsula soft-pedaled after the demise of Iran's Shah in 1979. But Iran still could not take over the Peninsula even after the Shah was ousted by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who, though a revolutionist, was equally as ambitious as his predecessor. (10) The reason for Iran's unsuccessfulness could be attributed to the cost of her immediate war with another power in the region. Because of the same reason for the dominance of the region, Iran and Iraq had gone into 8-year war between 1980 and 1988. The war which was then rated as the bloodiest since Second World War

ended with Iraq emerging victorious. The defeat of Iran had a psychological effect on Iran's quest for leadership of the region.

However, one undisputable fact that later reignited Iran's quest for regional hegemony was that during the war, Iran had carefully observed that chemical weapons were used by Iraq which led to Iran's assumption that Iraq had nuclear weapon ambition. This discovery inspired Iran to make necessary moves to develop nuclear weapons. Again, the fact that Iran observed the silence of international community over Iraq's use of chemical weapons on Iran's civilian population raised more eyebrows about its safety as a nation surrounded by countries aligned to the West, because Iran was aware that the West were superintending the international system which refused to take any action against Iraq for using unconventional weapons. Therefore, Iran's nuclear ambition indicates its interest to become not only a regional power but also a world power. (11) This could give Iran a voice in the community of nations.

Moreover, abundant natural gas complimented Iran's nuclear programme while abundant disposal of uranium enabled same. Also, the fact that Iran refused to adhere to the terms of Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 signed in New York, in which about eighty-five percent (85%) of countries of the world pledged not to transfer nuclear technology or help non-nuclear nation to build nuclear weapons, further revealed Iran's quest for power. Again, the opposition of stiff sanction by permanent members of the United Nations Security Council such as China and Russia, gave Iran more morale to continue its nuclear programme, hence its gradual emergence as a regional power. (12)

Nevertheless, Iran's gradual rise to power had a strategic dimension set in motion by its founding father Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini whose legacy continues to shape Iranian politics, national interest and foreign policy.(13) After overthrowing the Shah in 1979, Iranian government, under its supreme leader, established Islamic Revolution Guard Corp(IRGC) with over 350,000 members with the sole aim of promoting government social policies and ideologies through terrorism.(14) For instance, the Houthi fighters in Yemen are trained and sponsored by Iran and by controlling Yemen, Iran achieved a strategic and economic choke hold on Saudi Arabia and Israel.(15) While Houthi seized the Red Sea port Hodeida, Iran controls the Mandeb Strait connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean. The strategic link between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean serves as the passage to 3 million barrels of oil on a daily basis. (16)

Apart from strategic spheres, Iran with its nuclear programme had also employed diplomatic tact in bargaining, gamesmanship, exertion of regional influence and outright defiance against international sanctions and pressures. No doubt, Iran has always represented itself as a regional power to be reckoned with. Iran has also used different proxy armies (Shia) to curtail Saudi Arabia's influence and increased its own influence in the region with the extension of its Shi'ite Muslims to counter religious ideals of Iraq Sunni's Muslims.

However, Iran's quest for regional hegemony has always been opposed internally by contending nations in the region due to variety of reasons. Iran-Saudi Arabia feud has been ongoing for centuries and seemed unabated. This feud is rooted in the religious antagonism between the Sunni orthodox of Saudi Arabia and the Shi'ite theocracy of Iran. (17) The state of antagonism was worsened when the United States-led invasion in 2003, overthrew Sunni minority rule in Iraq and replaced same with majority Shi'ite government which gave Iran political advantage over Iraq at the expense of Saudi Arabia Sunni wing of Islam because each wing was indoctrinated against the other. Iran and Saudi Arabia also lock horns on oil matters with the former often pushing towards regional control of oil sales through quota while the latter favours unlimited control and sales.

Iran-Israel relation is such that Iran considers Israel as nothing other than a Zionist regime, (18) that heads Jewish political and cultural movement supporting the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This makes Iran to always support alternative militant groups which have their base in Gaza, West Bank and Southern Lebanon from which they can attack Israel. But Israel pursues its own regional interest through the primary hegemon, the United States, thus posing Israel as a power too difficult to surmount by Iran.

Iran-Egypt relations has been strained for many decades while Iran and Turkey share a common strong economic tie, but when it comes to regional conflict and contest, they are never at agreement. The combination of cordial and severe relation amongst them spots them out as two befitting regional powers with complex over the other just as can be witnessed in the far East between Russia and China. For example, Iran-Turkey relations saw the two nations joining hands to support Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria but failed to agree on armed upheaval of Egyptian President, Muhammad Morsi owing to complex issues. As a

result of challenges factored by Iran's strained relationships with contending powers in the region, Iran's quest for power status in the region and beyond seems unattainable.

5. THE UNITED STATES INTERFERENCE

The interference of United States in Iran's politics dates back to early 20th century when Reza Shah Pahlavi was backed as a puppet to restructure Iran politically and culturally. Between 1925 and 1941, Reza Shah Pahlavi founded the Pahlavi dynasty and also implemented various modernization reforms including secularization and the separation of religion from state affairs; promotion of education; infrastructure development; expansion of military and modernization of the armed forces; introduction of Western mode of dressing and suppression of traditional Islamic attire; abolition of the Islamic calendar and adoption of the solar calendar. These implementations implied (as intended by United States) overall change in the way of life of the Iranian people, most especially, change in their culture which is deeply rooted in Islamic tenets. Although by 1925 the cold war has not intensified like it later did after World War II, speculations were rife that United States' proactive move to impose its way of life on the Iranian people may not be unconnected to the jittery of communist revolution in Russia in 1917 and the fear of the spread of socialist ideology to the Middle East whose cultural values sync with communism.

However, instead of tilting towards communist Russia as expected, Reza Shah Pahlavi developed close ties with Nazi Germany. Nazism itself was an ideology which promoted the superiority of the Aryan race. Therefore, the silence of United States in 1941 when Britain and Soviet armies invaded Iran and forced the Sha to abdicate during the World War II, was understandable. The Sha was succeeded by his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, who maintained the status quo ante bellum for United States until in the 1950s when the reforms instituted by the Sha's family boomeranged. Formerly, Iran's leadership was tied to the monarchy in the sense that only the monarch could appoint the Prime Minister. During the Sha's reforms, a constitutional monarchy has been instituted which separated religion from state affairs and created the position of a Prime Minister who will be elected through popular sovereignty and no longer selected by the monarch. In 1951, Mohammed Mosaddegh emerged through popular sovereignty, as the Prime Minister of Iran, but because the Prime Minister nationalized Iran's oil refineries, he was ousted in 1953 through a coup allegedly orchestrated by the CIA, leaving Mohammed Reza Pahlavi a near absolute power. The United States further eliminated Mohammed Reza's political opponents who were perceived to be Islamic fundamentalists. This was reportedly done to protect the interest of U S and its allies in the oil business in Iran. After the coup the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), later renamed British Petroleum (BP), regained control of the oil refineries.

United States benefitted immensely from Iran's oil, and in return, sold modern weapons and also supplied Iran with nuclear reactor technology, a move said to have spurred Iran's nuclear adventure in 1957. Notably, Iran which was still an ally of United States, was as at then, being considered (even above Israel) as the rightful nation to be empowered for the regional hegemony in the Middle East. This cordiality was short-lived. Owing to much agitation for revenge over decades of U.S domination of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini staged a revolution in Iran coordinated from within and outside Iran. The revolution began in 1977 but gained momentum in 1978. It was in February 1979, that he took over the leadership of Iran on his return from exile. The American embassy was raided and taken over on November 04, 1979 by Iranian revolutionaries, a combination of students and militants, who were supporters of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the revolution. During the revolution, 52 American diplomats and citizens were taken hostage in response to U.S attempt to restore the deposed monarch, Mohammed Reza Palahvi. The hostage crisis lasted for 444 days after which the American hostages were released in 1981. This act caused the United States to severe relation with Iran. America later followed up the diplomatic severance with economic sanction. Khomeini damned the consequences of the sanction and consolidated his power through swift reforms. Through a nationwide referendum on March 30, 1979, he abolished the constitutional monarchy and established an Islamic Republic of Iran. Then on December 3, 1979, a new constitution was adopted which enshrined Khomeini as the supreme leader (Vali-e Faqih) of Iran. The constitution also stated that only the Faqih, that is, an Islamic cleric schooled in the Islamic education could become a supreme leader. Hence, the revolution of Khomeini marked a turning point in the history of Iran which became a theocracy under him.

The eventual radical changes witnessed by Iran under Khomeini exacerbated United States' hostile policy towards the country. In retaliation, United States assisted Saddam Hussein's Iraq to defeat Iran in a rivalry war between 1980 and 1988. During the war, United States helped Iraq to position missile cruisers which targeted and shot down Iranian civilian air bus, killing about 290 people onboard and of course Washington claimed it was an accident. In its usual characteristics of reprisal attacks, at the onset of the new millennium,

Iran funded, trained and assisted Shi'ites insurgence against U.S in Iraq. The U.S in return raided Iranian embassy in Iraq and arrested its staff. Nonetheless, the U.S on several occasions sent troops to Iran's Arab neighbours such as Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, from where U.S mounted international pressure on Iran to back down on its nuclear programme. In March 2006, U.S secretary of States, Condoleezza Rice stated as follows:

Iran has been the country that has been in many ways a kind of central banker for terrorism in important regions like Lebanon through Hezbollah in the Middle East, in Palestinian territories and we have deep concern about what Iran is doing in the south of Iraq. (19)

Consequent to the above complex, when Iran's nuclear programme reached alarming proportion, the U.S in 2007, allegedly launched Operation Stuxnet through which U.S was said to have collaborated with Israel to unleash viruses into Iran's computers. (20)

6. OPERATION STUXNET

Operation Stuxnet was an alleged covert cyber operation conducted by United States and Israel to disrupt Iran's nuclear programme. It was launched in 2007 and is considered one of the most sophisticated and successful cyber-attacks in history. The operation's objective was to sabotage Iran's uranium enrichment facilities, specifically the Natanz nuclear facility, by targeting the centrifuges used in enriching uranium. It was a highly sophisticated computer worm known as Stuxnet which was created to infiltrate and manipulate the industrial control systems (ICS) used to operate the centrifuges.

The worm was designed to, infiltrate the system through a USB drive or other means; identify and target the specific centrifuge control systems; manipulate the speed of the centrifuges causing them to spin out of control and self-destruct. The impact of operation Stuxnet was huge as Stuxnet successfully damaged an estimated 1,000 centrifuges (about 10% of Iran's total) and set back Iran's nuclear programme by several years. While neither the U.S nor Israel officially acknowledged responsibility, anonymous sources and experts have attributed the operation to a joint US-Israeli effort.

Significantly, Operation Stuxnet marked a pivotal shift in the use of cyber warfare as a tool of statecraft, demonstrating the potential for cyber-attacks to have physical consequences and impact national security. The operation equally had significance in international security because it demonstrated U.S complex about Iran's power status as well as the dilemma since it was U.S that first transferred nuclear technology to Iran five decades earlier.

7. THE SECURITY DILEMMA

Iran may eventually develop nuclear capabilities by itself as rumoured recently. Should Iran succeed in that venture, it will not owe its super power status to (the primary hegemon) United States and its allies; hence United States must have completely lost Iran in many respects. One, United States cannot wield the same level of kinetic political influence over Iran as it does over India and Israel. Secondly, nuclear weapons are technological inventions, hence, to help a nation develop such capability equally implies having a little knowledge and control over the operations of the recipient nation's weapons with regards to deployment and/or innovative advancements. Consequently, should Iran develop nuclear capabilities independently, United States will lose strategic leverage over Iran like that which it currently exercises through its alliance with Israel. Thirdly, the relationship gap between the U.S-led Judeo-Christian faction and the Iran-led Arab-Muslim faction could widen and the differences could sorely deepen. Lastly, Iran's unilateral attainment of nuclear power status may embolden it to heighten diplomatic confrontations with United States. Arguably, these reasons may compel United States to consider proactive actions such as supporting the nuclearization of Iran as well as making Iran a regional power in the Middle East.

Conversely, should United States consider the nuclearization of Iran as well as allowing Iran to attain power status in the Middle East region and beyond, there are other considerations which pose the dilemma. Islamic culture originally abhors Western lifestyle. Since United States tried for half a century to contain the spread of communism, an economic ideology flowing through the East, there is no guarantee that when Iran attains power status through the help of United States, that Iran will not turn into a buffer for the spread of communism in its region since it does not seem difficult for the socio religious ideology of the Arab and the socio-economic ideology of the East to blend into a force which could oppose the strength and influence of United States. Giving impetus to this is the fact that upon application, Iran is currently among the countries

which have been considered to join BRICS, a seemingly geopolitical arrangement being disguised as transregional trade bloc, but most importantly, being championed by the communist Eastern powers.

Moreover, Iran's theocratic nature appears to be a source of discomfort for some key decision-makers in the U.S and other leading democracies. It would only take a pronouncement by the Supreme Leader (or Cleric leader) in the name of the Prophet to potentially spur most Muslim Arabs into radical actions that would certainly be most unfavourable to U.S and its allies. However, leaving powers for U.S allies in the Middle East like Saudi Arabia and Israel only intensifies reactivity amongst the Muslim Arabs because by conserving Islamic values and tenets (more than Saudi Arabia) albeit through forceful means, Iran seems to have outranked Saudi Arabia in the socio-religious order which matters most to the Muslim Arabs; while Israel is only considered an imposed Zionist leadership. If United States empowers Iran through nuclearization, the restiveness and complex of the Muslim Arabs may reduce but radical elements among them who are extremists might pose danger to Israel and other United States' allies in the Middle East and beyond should they seize any of the unconventional weapons. Obviously, United States has more allies across the world than any other rival super powers and this equally implies that this danger poses a threat to global security.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section prioritises global security. In that vein, it attempts to historicize the issues within its field and propose solutions through recommended actions. Global security refers to the measures and strategies implemented to ensure the safety and well-being of global citizens and nations from various threats and hazards. These threats can be categorized into two, namely, traditional and non-traditional threats. For the purpose of this study, preference is placed on the traditional threats which include military conflicts and war, terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Hence, amidst the dilemma posed by the Iran question, any necessary course of action or decision that can be proactively taken to ensure immediate reduction of the tripod traditional threats in the international system will be adjudged crucial to the maintenance of global security.

To historicize, it is worth noting that the severance of relationship between United States and Iran stemmed from the attempt by the former to westernize the latter and to suppress the latter's ways of life, hence the latter felt that its fundamental existence was being threatened. That attempt by United States not only threatened the sovereignty of Iran but it also ventured to usurp Iran's authority in the region. In fact, analysts have condemned such attempt as unnecessary and have also attributed same to complex. It was either that United States felt that her sociocultural and socioreligious lifestyle was superior to Iran's or that United States felt that its socioeconomic interests and those of its Western allies were not safe enough in the hand of its ally, Iran; hence the attempt to westernize Iran through the monarch. The fact that the event took place at the onset of the Cold War, during which the West's capitalist ideologies aimed to counter and contain the spread of the East's socialist ideologies, contributed to the emergence of a subsequent speculative complex. Again, the above complex of United States that led it to misconstrue Iran's stance can be verified through the stance of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who overthrew the monarchical dynasty through a revolution led against the American-sponsored government in Iran. According to Rourke, after taking over power from Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Khomeini viewed capitalism and communism as twin devils threatening the purity of Islam. (21) Hence, he maintained Iran's neutrality till his death in 1989. Iran has continued to show the tapestry of his vision in dealing with super powers until recently when it appears that Iran has no more alternative means to attaining her power status than cooperating with the communist Eastern powers. Hence, United States has a decision to make, and it is urgent.

Imprimis, United States must desist from any attempt to colonize the Muslim Arabs socioculturally. This will correct the wrong impression earlier made on the psyche of Iranian citizens and beyond. Since Iran has made no pretense about its power quest and has remained resolute about the pursuit of such national interest, given Iran's open pursuit of its national interests, should United States not reconsider its stance and instead explore the option of engaging with Iran as a potential ally to promote global security through proactive diplomacy? To begin with, United States must engage Iran politically because political dialogue boosts trust and also improves sore relationship. The President of Iran, Masoud Pezeshkian, in one of his speeches, vowed that to create balance in relations with all countries in line with national interest is the prerequisite for peace. He further stated that Iran, under him, will not respond to pressure from United States [and the West]. (22) This is a signal that Iran is not backing down on its (nuclear) power quest even though he stated in the same speech that Iran will not pursue nuclear programme. It also signals that Iran is willing to work with any super power to achieve that quest. If Iran must develop its nuclear programme to nuclear power

capability, it has become crucial for global security that United States engages with Iran on this sensitive issue, providing guidance, support as well as the technology to ensure that Iran develops weapons that will be technically known to United States and that can be technologically controlled by United States (as exemplified in Operation Stuxnet) to reduce the tendency for future conflicts. Until recently, who would have believed that Iran could stop United States' movement through any part of the world. The blockade of the strait of Hormuz by Iran proves that United lacks the technical-know-how to deal with the underwater censored mines. It has been rumoured that the mines are the technology of the East. Should the rumour be a truism, then it is high time United States restructured to guarantee global safety. Again, since it is obvious that Iran set up the mechanisms of insecurity in the region by sponsoring sects across subordinate countries, during Iran's nuclearization talks, United States should dialogue with Iran towards disengaging the hierarchies of the terrorist sects while United States and its Western allies provide the financial incentives for rehabilitation of radicalized personnel. These moves by the American-led West has become crucial because, should Iran get nuclearized through the support of Eastern powers, the global balance of power (in terms of nuclear allies in both opposites) would shift at the detriment of the leading democracies. It has always been United States, Britain, France and Israel on one side versus Russia, China, North Korea and Pakistan on the other side. If Iran is added to the Eastern ranks it would become four versus five because India, a supposedly Western (economic) ally surrounded by the Eastern powers may choose to be militarily non-aligned (at the instance of a nuclear war) according to the doctrinal dictates of its founding father, Mahatma Gandhi. Moreover, with that occurrence, should United States allow that to occur, U.S hegemonic influence will wane, and there may be increased insubordination from revisionist states which are challenging the current world order and equally arranging for a new world order, hence the global security would not be guaranteed under such circumstance; given that most revisionist states are allies of Eastern powers, they will likely receive support from these powers at any time against the West.

Secondly, U.S should urgently improve economic ties with Iran. If possible U.S (and its Western allies) should go into a huge joint investment with Iran such as underwater pipelines for importation and exportation of crude oil and petroleum products. This will increase partnership and also renew the spirit of alliance which began to recede few decades ago due to distrust. It is a fact that nations with such joint investment hardly go into direct military conflicts or war because both share mutual interest. This will serve as a deterrent to prevent Iran from using its nuclear capabilities in the future against United States and the West, but most importantly restore Iran's confidence in U.S hegemony. More so, it will make Iran an ally of the West, and through this economic ties, terrorism could be reduced since Iran, a high ranking authority in the Middle East region will, in bid to maintain cordial (economic) relations as well as protect its interest, most likely place an embargo on the terrorist activities by calling the hierarchies of the sects to order.

Another confidence-building measure is joint military initiative on counter terrorism efforts. This could be done through regional security framework by establishing an inclusive framework, involving all regional stakeholders, to address shared security concerns. This is crucial because states in the Middle East with contending interests and considerable amount of almost equal influence, could sabotage the counter terror effort if such states assume that their collective interests are not being schemed in. Consequently, regional vigilante is advisable. Vigilante in that region can only be controlled by strong institutions hence strengthening, expanding and rebranding the regional security institution like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is recommended. Nonetheless, in the talks, Iran should be willing to recognise and respect Israel's right to sovereign existence in the region and promise to help deescalate Muslim insurgency against Israel. Lastly, immediately after the bilateral talks, there should be a follow-up multilateral talks that will ensure the destruction of conventional weapons which could be used by splinter jihadists to threaten global security and to destabilize trade flows in the Mediterranean Sea. Regarding the proposed multilateral talks, Okpata opined:

the international community is in dire need of Strategic Arms Demolition and Destruction Talks (SADDEST), because the challenge of security complex in the face of the new wars has rendered limitation and reduction talks anachronistic. SADDEST is thus the reconceptualisation par excellence for security complex which is strongly recommended for the [international] system [as a whole] and [particularly] for the UN Security Council. (23)

9. CONCLUSION

Security in the Middle East region is of utmost importance to global security in various ways. Stability in the Middle East ensures free flow of global trade while instability result in global economic depression. Moreover, the type of insecurity surging from there specifically targets United States, whose hegemonic influence enabled more allies across the world than other rival powers. Implicitly, the global security is not guaranteed.

Consequently, in a distinct nomenclature this study has historicized on one of the main causes of insecurity in the Middle East which is the lingering tension between the primary hegemon, United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran, an aspirant to the position of Middle East's hegemon.. Besides the fear that Iran is a theocracy and also the aboard of radical Islamic extremists, the state has, over the years, demonstrated flexibility in its foreign policy especially with regards to its relations with (super) powers of every given era. Its relations began, first, with United States in North America in the 1920s; tilted towards Nazi Germany of Central Europe in the late 1930s and early 1940s; returned to the West after the Second World War; remained non-aligned from late 1970s and also used that period to focus within its region which enabled it to consolidate its powers in the Middle East albeit through extreme means due to the urgency of the challenges it faced from greater powers. Recently, the direction of its relation points towards the East and the second world countries as can be witnessed in its recent application for membership of BRICS, an organization which looks like a camouflaged arrangement that seeks to pull down the existing world order and replace same with a new world order.

A fact is deducible from the narrative above and that is the fact that over the years Iran has remained resolute about its power quest in its region and beyond. Moreover, Iran has made it clear that its fundamental existence (which is the ways of life of the Iranian people) must not be jeopardized. Thus, United United States should come to terms with these two sacrosanct constants of Iran's sovereign interest and also begin to nurture policies for reconciliation. Hereby, it is suggested that the primary hegemon can still maintain a positive alliance with Iran, an aspirant to Middle East hegemon, if there is conscious effort at reparation and willingness for reconciliation and concession.

Empowering Iran in the Middle East is expected to quell the restiveness of the Muslim Arabs which is often demonstrated through terrorism. It is worth noting that terrorism (or in this context, global jihadism) is not as fundamental as Western media has usually portrayed it. To historicize, if truth be told, then it will be known that it was as a result of United States' overreaching policies on Iran that the Islamic Revolution Guard Corp (IRGC) was established by the Iranian leader, Khomeini, with over 350,000 adherents with the sole aim of promoting government social policies and ideologies through terrorism. It therefore follows that Iran's emancipation, and rise to regional and global influence would mark the fulfillment of the Corps' mission. When this eventually happens, United States should not worry about proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East since Iran, in an attempt to ensure that no contending nation in the region subverts its regional hegemonic influence, will police the proliferation within the region. Summarily, it can be asserted that if sincere efforts are made towards the implementation of the recommended actions for resolving the Middle East security dilemma, the traditional category of threats to global security namely military conflicts, terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, would have been extensively curtailed.

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