

## The Changing Role of Iran for Middle East (Arab) Countries

MUHAMMAD IBRAHIM, PhD scholar  
Lecturer  
Govt. Postgraduate College Bahawal Nagar  
Pakistan

### Abstract:

*The paper highlights and elucidates the main empirical and conceptual contours of the new strategic-political map that is emerging with new role of Iran. From the beginning of 21st century, the regional role of Iran elongating from Middle East to Afghanistan has significantly changed. There is great shift in Tehran's interest which has been placed in uprising effects of the Arab region. There are different issues as conflict in Syria and withdrawal of U.S./NATO from Afghanistan in 2014. The nuclear program and a proxy war with Israel are challenges for Iran. These issues undermine regional role of Iran. There is a vast gap between conservatives and liberals in Iran. Such gap has the possibility of more clashes on lines of Green Revolution of 2009. The relationship of numerous regional factors in the coming years can be predicted to evolve and eventually make regional position of Iran weaken. The dialogue between Iran and USA on nuclear program changed scenario in Middle East. There is a great shift in American's interest in this region. The democratic Iran is most acceptable for world.*

**Key words:** Iran, Middle East (Arab) countries, U.S.A.

### Introduction

Iran is one of the biggest states of the Middle East countries. It has five thousand year of fascinating history and with world's oldest unremitting major civilizations. In 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran has

specific significance for Middle East due to ally of America. There was fluctuation in this context as attack on Iraq in 2002 and different regional changes after uprisings in Arab region. In the study, it has been discussed about regional politics of Arab region and how the new strategic environment will affect the role of Iran in regional politics. It is also studied about Arabs political approach and attitudes toward Tehran. Iran has mixed political and religious approach about Middle East issues. Today there are no opponents which have clear stance about Iran, like ex-president Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Iran wishes to empower the Shi'a communities in different neighbor countries of Arab region, especially Bahrain. Damascus and Hezbollah in Lebanon are the key allies of Iran. The revolt and uprising issue of Syria has serious impact on Iran regional impetus role. The mutinies in Arab states need more costs than reparations for Iran. The democratic Egypt is an attractive supposition for the Arab world. There is hope to regain specific status in world. The vacuity of popular leadership existed in the Arab countries in which Iran's prospects look even weaker. Shi'a population uprisings in Arabs also increased a perceived Iranian threat. But this picture masks a far more complex reality in Arab attitudes toward Iran before and after the start of the Arab uprisings. This complexity is reflected not only in the gap of perception between the Arab people and Arab governments. Some Arab governments most threatened due to Iranian atomic program and wanted to see as weakened militarily.

## **Literature Review**

Michael Knights (Knights, 2006) writes in his article about security issues of Gulf States. US assistance is given to these states for the security purposes. Tariq Khaitous deliberated about the Arab world's relations with Iran in the article. These relations have obviously deep uncertainty due to religious and

political rivalry. There are disputes between the United Arab Emirates and Iran on three disputed islands located at the entrance of the Persian Gulf. Iraq has a dispute with Iran at issue of Shatt al-Arab waterway. (Tariq, Jun 2009) Kayhan, Barzegar write down about Iran's position in Arab region particularly gulf region in his article. Different scholars have keep eye on Iran's changing character in the region. Gulf States also perceived after US dialogue with Iran on nuclear issue. (Kayhan, 2010) Bromly Simen discussed about developments of states system of Arab region of Middle East. The states development system is based on old pattern of monarchy. There is no possibility of change in governing system. (Bromley, 2005) Raymond Hinnebusc writes about the Middle East where the regional subsystems is of anarchy appears in evidence. It holds most durable and intense conflict centers, the Arab-Israeli and the Gulf arenas. In the book it is accepted that states are to seek to counter threats. The state especially power accumulation and balancing which is key to regional order. (Raymond, 2002) The co-writers discussed about Iran's relations with neighbor countries. Iran has significance in the region of Middle East. Since 2003 USA attack on Iraq this zone is becoming as a war zone. (Robert, 2006)

## **Iran and the Arab Spring**

The foreign policy of Iran has two approaches toward the Middle East region that can be taken towards understanding conducts. Iran opted first approach in keeping the viewpoint of super powers his significance for Arab region. It is wished about Iran's foreign policy especially toward the Middle East must be changed. In global political approach Iran considers as a rebellious player in the international scenario. The issue of Iran has multi dimension which can be analyzed from all viewpoints. The behavior of Iran considered as a suspicious and pessimistic about the concept of Islamic republic that was

created after following revolution of 1979. The super powers of world concluded and established an approach which is based on about attitude of Iran that challenges the transnational peace and security of this region. Hezbollah is playing a role according to wish of Iran in Lebanon. On other side Hamas has vital role in Palestinian against Israel. (Michael Rubin, 26 Feb. 2002, p.4)

The other approach is focused on inside political, cultural and geopolitics realities of Iran. This approach is not focusing on any particular predominant factor. The critical point is to understand public awareness and wish about Iranian foreign policy. The foreign policy of Iran is based on the Iranian society's demands for the regional and global politics. The expectations of Iranian government are analyzed in second approach. It is observed that centuries-long silhouette Iran in the Arab region. Iran can be seen as a nation in politics of Middle East. The unique position of Iran will bring both challenges and opportunities that critically affect international politics in this region. The roots of Iranian foreign policy can be studied on the basis of cultural, political, and security demands of Iranian society toward the region and especially Iraq and Syria. The position of Iran for the Middle East region especially after the Iraqi and Syrian crisis has specific gratitude. It requires for an understanding at present as well as past history of Iran for global politics. (Maoz, 2003)

The law of nature is that changes are occurred in the world. In such changes boundaries or system of governments are changed. The contours of a new strategic landscape are taking shape in the Middle East Arab Spring has entered into fourth year. Reflecting the disordered state of regional politics, this landscape is far from stable. There is a leading role of Russia and China, but also Iran, as critical actors in regional and international diplomacy, complicating U.S. efforts to respond to the uprisings that began in Tunisia in December 2010. The people of Tunisia initiated against oppression,

dictatorship, and human rights violations which committed government of Tunisian. This Tunisia uprising initiated a systematic international Arab modernization movement called Arab Spring. Efforts by leading authoritarian regimes to enhance their regional influence are unfolding on several levels. Even as these authoritarian actors they struggle to absorb the consequences of the Arab Spring, including the uncertain effects of Arab democratization on their regional influence and ambitions. They have worked to consolidate their standing as a counterweight in the Middle East to the United States and its Western allies.

The wave of popular uprisings in 2011-12 in Arab world has contributed to undermining Iran's position in the Middle East. Moderate spill-overs of popular frustration toward authoritarian regimes took place in Iran against the political system. These actions refreshed, but failed to fully revive, the revolutionary Green Movement that followed the disputed victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad against liberal opposition candidates Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi in 2009. In 2011, Tehran's initial welcoming of an Islamic awakening in the Arab world as a means to strengthen a pan-Islamic, anti-American axis in the region quickly faded. Emerging Arab Islamist governments sought to strengthen the Sunni axis rather than the pan-Islamic one. The resumption of formal ties between Iran and Egypt after three decades of rupture was very significant

- Tehran has been placed in a critical position by the effects of the Arab Spring, the stalemated conflict in Syria and the U.S./NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- Iran could suddenly find itself isolated to an extent that is unprecedented in its recent history, and is running out of options.
- The Iranian authorities are planning for a major reinforcement of Iran's role in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of ISAF.

## Highlights

Iran's regional quagmire in symbolic terms, but it is not likely to do much to prevent the overall drop in support for Iran in the region. On his first visit to Tehran, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi unequivocally stated Egypt's support for the Syrian revolutionaries, not the Assad regime. Although Riyadh initially interpreted the uprisings as a threat to its own rule, victories at the polls for Arab Islamists may in the end turn out to be a win for conservative Sunni powers like Saudi Arabia. The political stakes of regime changes in the Middle East thus overlap in part with Sunni-Shia competition patterns, especially in the Gulf region. Iran's perception of being threatened by Sunni advances has been strengthened by the demonstrations that rocked Bahrain, where a Shiite majority is essentially governed by a Sunni minority, as well as by the ambiguous position of the United Arab Emirates, which has a large Iranian expatriate population and extensive economic ties with Iran.

The Bashar al-Assad regime had violent and repressive behavior towards the Syrian population and the torture of students by Syrian's governmental forces in March 2011. There was many Arab nations with international community had pressure to reform government due to national protests by Syrian population against the Bashar al-Assad regime. Bashar al-Assad has not resigned from being the president of Syria because he is still able to maintain control with the help of Russia and Iran. Bashar al-Assad has relied on allied countries Iran and Russia to block international action. He is hoping during this time to put down the protesters. Iran is keeping up back Bashar al-Assad in power for his commitment, alliance, and support of Iran's controversial goals in the region and the world.

Iran looks likely to lose its most faithful ally in the region with fall of the Assad regime in Syria which will contribute to

isolating of Iran that's why Iran politically and military supported Assad regime. The country now faces a potential split of its territory between Sunnis opposed to the regime and Alawites loyal to Bashar al-Assad. It leads to a danger of tangible sectarian divisions as well as their potential instrumentalisation to advance political agendas. Even if Assad can hold onto power for years to come, Syria will no longer be the strong state that it had been for decades. The Syrian uncertainty requires a rethinking of Iran's strategy toward Israel and could drastically impact its support to both Hezbollah and Hamas. (Shahar Ilan, 2007)

The proposition that the Arab Spring may be generating changes that are compounding the security and diplomatic challenges facing the United States goes against no small amount of conventional thinking in Washington. The regional political revolutions have rung alarm bells in Moscow, Tehran, and Beijing as well. Indeed, Russia and Iran will probably lose one key state ally in the region, see a second leading state ally weakened, and, in turn, will have to grapple with the weakening of their key non-state allies— Hamas and Hezbollah. However, escalating conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians, Sunnis and Shi'ites, and emerging Arab democracies and authoritarian status quo regimes are also opening spaces for Moscow, China, and even Iran to exercise new leverage. Indeed, Washington's key Arab ally, Egypt, is now led by Islamist leaders who are profoundly unhappy with— if not opposed to—the regional order that the United States has promoted. Further to the east, the escalating civil war in Syria has created new space for radical jihadists, thus raising the possibility that a post-Assad Syria might be led by an Islamist government that will seek to make common cause with other Sunni-Islamist governments. Although such a Sunni axis may in theory view Shi'ite Iran as a threat, growing popular dissatisfaction with U.S. policies may tilt that axis against Washington far more than Tehran. (Ramazani, 2004)

Many leaders in new Arab governments remain ambivalent about the global distribution of power and the role of the United States in supporting what they see as a lopsided international order. President Morsi's August 30, 2012 speech before the Non- Aligned Movement illustrates the ongoing efforts of a new Arab leader to harmonize these possibly dissonant chords. Standing before his Iranian hosts, he implicitly rebuked them for supporting Bashar al-Assad, while offering a spirited call both for democracy, and for an Egyptian led bid to revise the international political and social order.

With newly empowered citizens questioning a regional order anchored in regional relationships with the United States, the worldview articulated by Russia, China, and even Iran may create new opportunities for regional influence. In setting out this new map the ways in which powerful authoritarian regimes collaborate to advance collective interests in sustaining or consolidating institutional and strategic alternatives to Western democracy; and second, their associated bid to use the Arab Spring to mobilize support from regional- democratic powers including Iran and others. Because the leaders of these regional powers are sympathetic to critiques of Western economic and geo-strategic dominance, global authoritarian regimes view these leaders as potential allies whose support can be enlisted to redefine regional and global security and governance structures in ways that complicate the diplomatic and strategic environment in which the United States works to advance its interests. (Etzioni, 2010)

While striking this balance will in no small way depend on the particular trajectory of political change in each Arab state and the nature of the government ensuing from that dynamic a U.S. effort to address long standing regional conflicts could go a long way to facilitating a new U.S. diplomacy. On that score a sustained effort to address the stalled Palestinian-Israeli dispute, as well as a renewed bid to resolve the stand-off with Iran on the nuclear issue, would be most useful.



Finally we must keep in mind that apart from the challenges posed by global autocracy and the efforts of new Arab leaders to forge a new diplomacy that leverages a changing regional and global map, Washington itself must reckon with ambivalence regarding multi-lateral efforts to promote notions of global governance and human rights. Indeed, given the reluctance of Washington and its Western allies to intervene in Syria despite the ongoing humanitarian crisis, and given that U.S. security interests in the Gulf have thus far tempered its response to Gulf regimes that have repressed democratic uprisings, U.S. global diplomacy will continue to be framed by a multiplicity of conflicting philosophical and security interests. The resulting dissonance in our own diplomacy will hardly be unwelcome news for some of our Gulf allies. Viewing the ongoing domestic struggle in Bahrain with concern, they will probably welcome evidence of the enduring constraints that impede any bid to consolidate norms of global governance that conflict with a traditional notion of state sovereignty. (Global Security Newswire, "Arab States Back Pressure on Iran, Rice Says, 2008)

Tehran could suddenly find itself isolated to an extent that is unprecedented in its recent history. And it is running out of options. Locking Iran out of talks on the future of Libya and Afghanistan would further escalate its feeling of encirclement. In this uncertain environment, a military attack on Iran would have devastating effects for regional stability. It could force the regime into adopting a 'nothing-to-lose' approach, acting as the region's spoiler and engaging in tactics of retaliation in Afghanistan, Central Asia and the South Caucasus. An attack would also weaken the domestic opposition to the regime in the name of nationalism.

Lebanese Hezbollah Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) is one regional partner that has taken on a more direct combat role in Syria as the increasingly embattled Assad regime began to lose control over parts of Syria in 2012. From the early stages of the

conflict, LH has supported Assad with a robust, well- trained force whose involvement in the conflict aligns with Iranian strategic interests. Hezbollah has played an integral role in the continued violence and has provided increasing levels of support for Assad since the beginning of the conflict. Hezbollah has also worked with Syrian officials to ensure the passage of Iranian arms shipments to Syria. (Rubin, 2006)

Hezbollah has strengthened its political and military dominance in Lebanon and has emerged as its own actor in the region. The conflict in Syria has placed Hezbollah on the defensive to protect its support base and ensure the continuation of supply routes from Syria into Lebanon. These supply lines can be maintained by preserving Assad, even if his regime contracts to a defensive posture around Damascus, Homs and the coast. Hezbollah militants were fighting in Syria and claimed they were fighting of their own accord and not under the direction of Hezbollah leadership. Hezbollah fighters are well situated to provide advice and training to Syrian armed forces, pro-regime paramilitaries, and Shi'a proxy groups because of their native Arabic language and experience with light infantry combat operations. Any advisory and assistance force faces linguistic challenges operating beyond its borders, and Persians operating in Arab lands are no exception. Hezbollah's Lebanese Arabs are better suited to work closely with Syrian counterparts than Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Hezbollah's experience fighting in low-intensity conflict could be a valuable supplementary asset for Assad's armored forces. (Barzegar, 2005)

## **Conclusion**

The multiple challenges have to face for Iranian decision-making circles both internally and internationally. The authorities are facing complicated situation in different dimension which are overlapping at international issues such

as, the nuclear programme and relations with the United States and regional security issues as in the Syrian crisis and the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The country is at a crossroads. There is possibility to diminished significant role of Iran in the coming months and years. There is a chance for benefit from new spaces for projecting its power both in the Middle East and in wider Central Asia. In Syria, Tehran wants to have a say in any solution that emerges. It is trying to initiate some low profile contacts with parts of the Syrian opposition, and could probably provide the Baath security organs remain in power. However, Iran's economy is also suffering from the new threat of Israel's attack, with or without U.S. support. Iran's regional status is therefore under threat, as is the regime itself, which could face renewed domestic unrest.

In conclusion, Iran supports the Bashar al-Assad regime because Iran knows the Bashar al-Assad regime will continue its support, alliance, and cooperation with Iran, which is vital to Iran's goals to manipulate events in the Middle East in order to prevent regional and international resolution over Israel, to maintain a regional Shi'a ally, to keep the geographic freedom of movement to transit weapons and troops to and through Syria, and to keep its partnership with Syria in developing weapons of mass destruction. If the Bashar al-Assad regime is removed, it is highly unlikely the regime that replaces Bashar Al-Assad will be as accommodating in helping Iran achieve its regional and international goals. There is a possibility that if the current Bashar Al-Assad regime collapses or is successfully removed Syria may experience a leadership void and internal chaos. In this case, Syria would be in no position to assist Iran in any way and could lead to a more dangerous and destabilizing situation in the region. If Syria experiences a leadership void, chaos, and no international support of troops on the ground in Syria, Israeli officials and intelligence analysts say they also worry about an increased presence by Al Qaeda in Syria and the possibility that Syria's large storehouse of arms

could end up in the hands of Hezbollah and other anti-Israel groups.

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