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## IRAN'S NUCLEAR DEAL AND ROLE OF MAJOR POWERS

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### ABSTRACT :

*While the US will continue to play an important role in the West Asian region, and remain a major player there, it is believed that China would also assert its influence in the region with the help of Iran especially after the nuclear deal between P5+1 and Tehran. The idea that China can preserve a dialogue with a benignly economic focus on the region without having a strategy to deal with harder security issues, is probably unsustainable. From the Iranian perspective, China has played a significant role in resolving Iran's nuclear crisis through peaceful means and dialogue.*

**KEYWORDS :** major player , harder security.



### INTRODUCTION :

One of the most complex security challenges for the West, especially the US and Israel, is Iran's quest for nuclear enrichment programme in the West Asia region. Iran's defiance of international opinion over its nuclear programme has led to a situation where the US has indicated that were diplomacy to fail, recourse to military options might be pursued. The US and its allies accuse Iran of using its civilian programme as a cover to develop nuclear weapons. However, Iran has rejected the charges, saying its programme is for purely civilian purposes and geared toward generating electricity and producing radioisotopes to treat cancer patients. Recently on April 7, 2012, an Iranian parliamentarian, Gholamreza Mesbahi Moghadam, said, "Iran has the technological capability to produce nuclear weapons but it was not Tehran's policy to go down that route."<sup>i</sup> It is the first time that a politician has publicly declared that the Islamic Republic of Iran has the knowledge and skills to produce a nuclear weapon.

Finally, Iran and P5+1 signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on July 14, 2015. Under the agreement Iran agreed to suspend nuclear enrichment programme and allow inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to visit Iran to inspect its nuclear facilities. Western countries including the US also agreed to lift all the economic sanctions. America has also agreed to allow Iran to withdraw more than US\$ 100 billion of frozen assets from the US bank which was seized due to the sanctions.<sup>ii</sup> On January 16, 2016, the IAEA verified that Iran has completed the necessary steps under the Iran deal that will ensure Iran's nuclear program is and remains exclusively peaceful.<sup>iii</sup> According to the deal Iran

will no longer have a source for weapons-grade plutonium and will not be able to build a single heavy-water reactor for at least 15 years. Most of the countries of the world including India supported for the Iran nuclear deal. This is considered the best solution to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon without taking military action. The US former Secretary of State says the agreement limits Iran's centrifuges and stockpiles, which are "remarkable" changes. He said "I Think It Is A Good Deal."<sup>iv</sup> Heads of State, The U.K., Germany, and France said "The agreements provides the foundation for resolving the conflict on Iran's nuclear programme permanently."<sup>v</sup> Iran's arch rival country in the region also supported the nuclear deal between P5+1 and Tehran. Saudi Arabia foreign minister, Adel Al-Jubeir said my country is in a favour of nuclear deal that prevents Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have also strongly supported the deal, including at the April 2016 US-GCC summit meeting in Riyadh.<sup>vi</sup> However, after the election of the US new president, Donald Trump in November 2016, the deal also came in danger zone as we have heard his statements during presidential election campaign.

### IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Shah had started its ambitious nuclear programme in cooperation with the United States, France, and Germany. The Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant was started in 1974 by the German firm, Siemens, as part of the nuclear programme initiated by the Shah but was suspended after the Islamic Revolution. Iran's first Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, decided that Iran did not need nuclear energy, and therefore the work at Bushehr was halted post-Revolution, in February 1979. The facility was again affected by bombings during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88. The project was sought to be revived in January 1995, when Tehran signed a US\$ 800 million contract with Russia for the completion of a 1000 Mw pressurised light-water reactor within four-and a-half years. The Russian firm, Atomstroieexport, started construction work in the same year. Finally, the Russian firm completed Iran's first Nuclear power plant (Bushehr) in 2011.

In 1984, Iran started the Nuclear Research Centre (ENRC) at Esfahan to research reactor technology, nuclear fuel cycle including uranium enrichment, and chemical reprocessing of depleted uranium to extract plutonium. Before the Islamic Revolution Iran had signed a contract with France to build a research reactor for the Esfahan centre, but Paris cancelled that contract after the Revolution. In June 1985, during Rafsanjani's visit to Beijing, China and Iran signed a protocol for cooperation with Iran on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The 1985 contract was not revealed or officially acknowledged at the time, but under the deal, China supported Iran to develop the ENRC. Most of Iran's China-aided nuclear activities under the 1985 deal were based at ENRC.

Construction of the first reactor started in January 1988, and the reactor went critical in January 1992. Construction of the other three all started in January 1990, and those reactors went critical in January 1992, March 1994, and June 1995, respectively. China supplied the fissile material for all four reactor cores.<sup>vii</sup> These four research reactors and their related nuclear fuel were later declared and put under IAEA safeguards and often examined by the IAEA.

Like the Shah's regime, Islamic Republic especially during the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani insisted that its intention was to support an independent nuclear enrichment programme, including an ability to enrich uranium for nuclear fuel. The aspiration for a self-sufficient fuel cycle has become a widespread national ambition.<sup>viii</sup> Iranians believe that Iran needs to produce its own fuel because it cannot rely on foreign countries that might disrupt fuel supply agreements, as they did after the 1979 Revolution. Later, then President Mohammad Khatami announced the existence of the Natanz (and other) facilities on Iran's television, however, he invited the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to visit them. Khatami invited the IAEA inspectors to show transparency and to build a sort of confidence to carry out the nuclear programme and improve relations with the European countries. Since then, the IAEA's experts and inspectors have visited Iran several times.

After Khatami's two consecutive terms, Iranian reformists and liberals as well as the European countries were hoping for Rafsanjani to win the June 2005 elections. It was expected that the presidential election results would influence the way in which Iran moved ahead during Khatami presidency especially regarding the nuclear programme. During his presidential campaign, Rafsanjani had said, "The sound strategy is that we should continue talks with the Europeans; and Europeans and we should be patient to build a sort of confidence which can enable us to carry out the enrichment."<sup>ix</sup> However, election results surprised the people of Iran as well as the world. Rafsanjani did not win. Ahmadinejad, who was seen as a hardliner on the nuclear issue, was elected. Ahmadinejad immediately signalled his support for moving forward with Tehran's nuclear programme. On June 27, 2005, he was quoted as saying, "It is the right of the Iranian nation to move forward in all fields and acquire modern technology. Nuclear technology is the outcome of scientific progress of Iranian youth."<sup>x</sup> He also reiterated that Iran would not surrender its right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. However, the president and council of ministers could not take decision on the nuclear issue because the decision was largely in the hands of the Supreme Leader.

However, one thing is clear here that nuclear enrichment programme is a national pride for all Iranians including political elites, and they would not be surrendering its rights at least for peaceful purposes. Recently on March 19, 2012, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei stated that Iran's success in enriching uranium to 20 percent and turning it into fuel plates to operate the Tehran research reactor "surprised the enemies".<sup>xi</sup> He added that despite Western sanctions the country has been making unprecedented technological progress.

### IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

Iran's political elite is unanimous that the country should continue to pursue its nuclear programme for peaceful purposes. The divisions are over the approach to be taken in dealing with the international community. While the hardliners led by former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad seemed to favour confrontation, the centrists and reformists wish to pursue a non-confrontational stance and may be even accept some limits on the programme. The moderate conservatives also wish to pursue a non-confrontational stance. Because of Ahmadinejad's determination to pursue the current confrontationist policy; conservatives have become divided into two groups – moderate conservatives and neo-conservatives or hardliners (headed by Ahmadinejad).<sup>xii</sup> Moderate conservatives were headed by Ali Larijani (present speaker of the *Majlis*), Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (the mayor of Tehran), Gholam Ali Haddad (former speaker of *Majlis* and presently Member of Parliament, whose daughter is married to Khamenei's son) and others loyal to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. They have been critical of Ahmadinejad's confrontational approach and the resulting deterioration in Iran's ties with the international community, and the West in particular. Similar criticism has also been directed at Ahmadinejad by a coalition of centrists and reformists headed by former President Mohammad Khatami, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mir Hussain Mousavi (leader of the Green movement). However, it is obvious that Iran cannot continue its nuclear programme without the help of Russia and China.<sup>xiii</sup>

Iran's present Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, recently in February 2012 underlined during a meeting in Tehran with the director and officials of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) and nuclear scientists that Iran will prove to the entire world that nuclear weapons cannot solidify power. Khamenei also pointed out that scientific and nuclear achievements are directly linked to the country's national interests and its future success. He said, "If nations manage to independently achieve progress in the fields of nuclear energy, aerospace, science and technology, there will be no room left for the tyrannical hegemony of global powers." Khamenei emphasised that the Iranian nation has never sought and will never seek nuclear weapons. He said "the possession of nuclear weapons as a great sin, in terms of thought, theory and religious edict, and

also believes that holding such weapons is useless, costly and dangerous". He also underlined that decision-making establishments in countries that stand against Iran are quite aware that Iran does not seek nuclear weapons. The sanctions have been imposed on the country since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, although the nuclear issue is a recent one.<sup>xiv</sup>

However, Ahmadinejad's statements have often antagonised the US and its allies. Ahmadinejad said, "The people of Iran will not give up their right to exploit peaceful nuclear technology... They are not intimidated by the arrogant uproar and propaganda today."<sup>xv</sup> Recently, in his keynote speech to UN Conference on the revision of the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), he said that nuclear bomb is a crime against humanity, not for defence.<sup>xvi</sup> However, he also added that "our religion prohibits us from having nuclear arms. Our religious leader has prohibited it from the point of view of religious law".<sup>xvii</sup>

Rouhani election has raised high expectations among the Iranians that he would pursue moderate policies and improve Iran's economic conditions. However, Rouhani's moderate and liberal approach towards the nuclear deal with the West has not gone down well with the Iranian hardliners. Rouhani's administration has also been challenged by conservatives over the interim nuclear deal. There is a clear divide between the hardliners who seem sceptical of the final outcome, whereas the moderates have called it a vindication of their choice of Rouhani as president. A short time after the agreement was reached on November 24, 2013, contradictory statements were heard. Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said that the deal was an opportunity for the "removal of any doubts about the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme". However, he stressed that Iran had not given up its right to enrich uranium. The Chief of the Expediency Council and Former President, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who is considered by the West as a "saviour" working to promote Western-Iranian relations, called the agreement an "ice breaker" that had overwhelmed the taboo in relations with the US. Khamenei has also praised the nuclear negotiating team. He stated that the "achievement of what you have described deserves appreciation and gratitude to the nuclear negotiators team and other contributors and can be a basis for the next wise measures".<sup>xviii</sup> He also pointed out that no one should call the negotiating team compromisers.

Some parliamentarians like Zareie questioned the deal adding, "Why would the IAEA be granted access to Iran's centrifuge workshops, while the NPT did not have such provisions, and that accepting such inspections violated the country's independence."<sup>xix</sup> Others said that the Geneva nuclear deal should be ratified by the Iranian Parliament. However, the Head of *Majlis* Legal and Judicial Commission, Allahyar Malekshah, defended the Geneva agreement and said, "The Geneva agreement is a preliminary agreement, therefore, it does not need to be ratified by *Majlis*."<sup>xx</sup> According to the Articles 77 and 125 of the Iranian Constitution, international treaties, protocols, contracts, and agreements must be approved by the *Majlis*. Malekshahi stressed, "*Majlis* approval would be necessary, if a preliminary agreement is changed into a permanent one."<sup>xxi</sup> Despite domestic criticism, Iran announced stopping of high-end uranium enrichment on January 20, 2014.<sup>xxii</sup> The IAEA also confirmed that Iran has halted 20 per cent uranium enrichment by cutting the link feeding cascades enriching uranium at Natanz and Fordo. Iran also gave guarantees that it will not enrich uranium at other locations.

### PRESIDENT ROUHANI AND IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

On February 15, 2015, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Tehran said that a comprehensive nuclear deal between Iran and P5 plus one (the US, China, Britain, France, Russia and Germany) was possible if world powers in general and China in particular would take strong steps. A final deal would be done at the earliest with China's help and cooperation and within the framework of the talks with Iran and the P5+1 countries. He stressed "Under the current circumstances, a final agreement can

be reached in a short time if there is sufficient political will in the other party; and an effective presence by China [in the nuclear talks] can help further shorten that time.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

Just one day after nuclear deal on July 14, 2015, between Iran and the P5+1, Chinese media highlighted Beijing's role in the nuclear debate. *China Daily* wrote that China had played a uniquely constructive role in the historic nuclear deal concluded in Vienna (Austria). In this context, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said,

Today is a historical day and I believe the most significant success of the agreement is that it keeps vigilance on the global non-proliferation system. While Iran made a political commitment not to develop nuclear weapons, it has been given the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy. It is also turning a new page of Iran's relationship with the other parties.<sup>xxiv</sup>

He also added the long-awaited agreement, which aims to limit Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for the gradual suspension of sanctions, succeeded because it adhered to the principle of a political solution despite difficulties and complexities. The deal has been an effective initiative for the global community to resolve major differences through dialogue, and it also set a good example for solving other global and regional important and controversial issues.

After the nuclear deal, China announced that Beijing is willing to cooperate with Tehran for the modernisation of Iran's heavy water reactor in the Central city of Arak. On August 27, 2015, Iran and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to redesign the Arak heavy water reactor and build several new nuclear reactors in Iran. The head of the AEOI, Ali Akbar Salehi, pointed out that Iran and China agreed to modernise the Arak heavy water reactor and cooperate in producing 20,000-megawatt of nuclear electricity.<sup>xxv</sup> Both countries expressed their willingness for enhanced cooperation in technical and engineering arenas, and Salehi commented on Iran's accessibility to the third generation nuclear technology and financing the nuclear projects as well. During Salehi's meeting with senior Chinese officials, including Chairman of China Atomic Energy Authority (CAEA), Xu Dazhe, China stressed the need for the further development of their cooperation in using peaceful nuclear technology. The AEOI wants to develop cooperation with CAEA on the construction of small new power plant with the capacity of 100 megawatts with cost-effective expenses in light of the capacity to generate electricity for limited area, produce industrial steam plant and purify water. Both officials agreed on the construction of such power plants to produce a total amount of 1,000 megawatts electricity to supply to the national grid.

### IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME AND CHINA SUPPORT

In 1989, two significant events happened almost simultaneously after which China and Iran respectively entered a new era. On June 3, 1989, first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ayatollah Khomeini died and on the next day, June 4, 1989 the Tiananmen incident took place after which the US imposed sanctions on China. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran's relations with the West especially with the US became rocky and after eight years of war with Iraq, the country was in urgent need of arms and ammunition. China helped Iran by supplying arms then and the two countries became closer allies. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident, China's close cooperation with Iran was important to give the US the message that the two countries were not going to accept foreign interference in their internal affairs. China and Iran then moved closer on nuclear cooperation as well.

During past years, especially when Iran was under tremendous international sanctions, China insisted that diplomacy was the sole way to find a solution to Iran's nuclear case. Now that everybody believes in diplomacy on this issue, China can play a more proactive role, though it has practically appeared passive so far. There is no doubt that China and Russia enjoy enough potential to mount pressure on the US. The US Congress has been trying to make Iran's nuclear case, which is a key international security issue, a hostage of the United



States' domestic policies. If China shows necessary initiative in this regard, it will have several opportunities for its future ties with Iran. In addition to playing this role, China can also help establish sustainable stability and security in the Persian Gulf region which is the source of more than 50 per cent of Beijing's imported oil.<sup>xxvi</sup> On the Iranian nuclear issue, the Chinese President Hu Jintao underlined that the China would always support Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and is committed to the peaceful conclusion of the Iranian nuclear issue.<sup>xxvii</sup>

In 1985, China and Iran signed their first nuclear agreement.<sup>xxviii</sup> China supplied the core elements of Iran's nuclear programme. In 1985, China secretly agreed to help Iran establish a nuclear research centre. In 1991, China secretly transferred 1.8 tons of uranium isotopes to Iran to use in a series of benchmark experiments associated with mastering basic atomic chemistry. In the mid-1990s, China provided Iran with detailed design for a uranium conversion facility.<sup>xxix</sup> Several of those transfers were clandestine and not reported to the IAEA.

By 1987, fifteen AEOI engineers were reportedly training in China. In 1991, Chinese engineers were reportedly working at Darkhovin, near Ahvaz, and at Moallem Kalayeh near Qazvim, installing uranium enrichment equipment.<sup>xxx</sup> It is believed that the Chinese engineers helped Iran with the expansion of the Qadir Khan-supplied centrifuge designs. Whatever China's involvement in Iran's clandestine centrifuge enrichment programme, production of the components for those centrifuges and mechanical testing of the assembled devices started a decade later in 1997 and continued until now, according to Iran's subsequent report to the IAEA.<sup>xxxi</sup>

In January 1990, then Deputy Director of China's Commission for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defence, General Jiang Hua, and Iran's then Minister of Defence, Ali Akbar Torkan, signed a 10-year agreement including provisions for further nuclear cooperation. The January 1990 deal was announced by the Chinese news agency, Xinhua, shortly after it was signed. This was a significant departure: China was beginning to defend rather than hide and deny its international nuclear cooperation. Garver argues,

The announcement also clarified the logic of the deal: China was rich in uranium, and the export of nuclear fuel and nuclear fuel technology earned foreign exchange for the country and had great attraction to the developing countries. Pakistan, Syria, and Ghana were also mentioned along with Iran as potential customers.<sup>xxxii</sup>

During 1991, China covertly sent to Iran 1,600 kilograms (1.6 metric tons) of uranium products. This deal was not reported to the IAEA until 2003, when it was reported by China itself once the transfer was discovered by IAEA investigators.<sup>xxxiii</sup> This Chinese uranium provided the input for a number of Iranian "benchmark" reprocessing and enrichment experiments, mostly at the ENRC, over the next decade.

The July 1991 Iran visit by then Chinese Premier Li Peng was a major step in the Iran-China nuclear cooperation. Li and then Iranian President Rafsanjani discussed nuclear cooperation between the two countries. Both leaders agreed in principle that China would complete a large nuclear power plant at Bushehr, on Iran's Persian Gulf coast, started by France and Germany in the mid-1970s but abandoned after the 1979 Revolution, as discussed above. Both leaders also agreed that technical committees in trade, technology, military, and scientific cooperation would draft specific agreements. Confronted by growing Western scepticism, Beijing publicly defended its nuclear cooperation with Iran. The spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to reports of nuclear cooperation between China and Iran by saying that such cooperation was purely for non-military purposes and only for peaceful use, and that reports of cooperation in the area of nuclear weapons development were "utterly groundless". He also added that Chinese nuclear cooperation with other countries, including Iran, was in accordance with three principles: first, it was purely for peaceful purposes; second, it was open to international inspection; and third, the recipient country pledged not to transfer China-supplied materials or technologies to a third country without China's permission.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In September 1992, when the Iranian President Rafsanjani made a four-day visit to China accompanied by Defence Minister Ali Akbar Torkan and other top military officials, another nuclear cooperation deal was signed. Garver explains,

During the visit Rafsanjani and Yang Shangkun presided over the signing of a twelve-point agreement by science and technology minister Song Jian and AEOI head Reza Amrollahi. The deal offered for cooperation in designing, building, and operating nuclear power plants; research on reactors; exploration for and mining of uranium ore; radiation safeguards; and ecological protection.<sup>xxxv</sup> According to the deal China was to help in building of at least four 300-megawatt nuclear power stations modelled after a recently constructed nuclear plant at Qinshan, Zhejiang province. These reactors would have produced large quantities of plutonium-rich depleted uranium fuel. Officials from both sides pointed out that all reactors transferred under the deal would be fully covered by IAEA safeguards. In March 1996 China, Iran, India, and Russia signed a protocol in Moscow establishing an Asian Fusion Research Foundation to cooperate in the study of fusion.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In August 2004, China appreciated Iran's cooperation with the inspectors of the IAEA and the progress achieved by the IAEA on the verifications in Iran's nuclear enrichment programme. Chinese Ambassador to Iran, Zhang Yan said,

We have noticed that the action plan agreed during the Director General's visit to Iran in April 2004 has been under firm implementation...Therefore, the Chinese side encourages Iran to strengthen further its comprehensive cooperation with the IAEA and truly fulfils its commitments with a view to resolving the remaining issues as soon as possible.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

He also pointed out that China believes that the right of countries, including Iran, to peaceful uses of nuclear energy should be respected and recognised and that the present progress achieved by the nuclear watchdog indicated that the Iranian nuclear issue could be resolved within the framework of the IAEA by diplomatic means of dialogue and cooperation.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

In June 2010 after China's vote in the UNSC China's Ambassador to Iran, Li Baodong said that over the years, China has been dedicated to resolve Iran's nuclear programme through peaceful means, and Iran, too, has made significant cooperation with the IAEA. China also welcomes and highly values the tripartite agreement between Brazil, Turkey and Iran on nuclear fuel exchange for the Tehran research reactor. He also added that full use of the positive momentum created by the agreement would be made, and no effort spared to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue peacefully, through dialogue and negotiations.<sup>xxxix</sup>

### Iran's Nuclear Deal and the US

The US's lawmakers, however, are still divided about the 100-page nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1. The US Congress has a 60-day review period and could block the further movement of the deal. However, President Barack Obama has already cleared that he will use veto if Congress blocks the deal. Obama pointed out that the US and its international partners achieved something that decades of hostility have not – a comprehensive, long-term deal with Iran that will avert it from gaining a nuclear weapon. Obama also added,

I want to thank our negotiating partners – the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China, as well as the European Union – for our unity in this effort, which proved that the world can do remarkable things when we share a vision of peacefully addressing conflicts. We showed what we can do when we do not split apart.<sup>xl</sup> On September 1, 2015, Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said

On the decisions adopted in the US, we have said since the beginning that we consider the US administration responsible for implementing the JCPOA and any measure against the JCPOA by the US congress should be stopped by the US administration otherwise the JCPOA will be violated.<sup>xli</sup>

Opponents of the Iran nuclear deal in the US (especially the Republicans) lost the debate in Congress but were not willing to accept it. According to *Mehr News Agency*, the first House vote was on a resolution to approve the Iran deal, and failed, 162 to 269. Every Republican voted against it, with the exception of Rep. Thomas Massie (The approval resolution was not intended to pass, but, rather, to send a message that the nuclear accord does not have majority backing in the House. The lower chamber then passed a resolution to reject the deal and eliminate the president's power to waive sanctions. The resolution passed 247 to 186,<sup>xiii</sup> with all but two Democrats opposing it. Again, the vote served only as a messaging tool and had no legal impact, since Senate Democrats had already blocked a similar vote on September 10, 2015.

Undoubtedly, Iran has a qualitatively divergent relationship with the US. Overall, Iran is not only under the UNSC and Western sanctions and military threats from Israel, but it also lacks any direct diplomatic relationship with Washington. However, the Hassan Rouhani government has been trying to build direct contact with the US officials.

## CONCLUSION

While the US will continue to play an important role in the West Asian region, and remain a major player there, it is believed that China would also assert its influence in the region with the help of Iran especially after the nuclear deal between P5+1 and Tehran. The idea that China can preserve a dialogue with a benignly economic focus on the region without having a strategy to deal with harder security issues, is probably unsustainable.

From the Iranian perspective, China has played a significant role in resolving Iran's nuclear crisis through peaceful means and dialogue. China also strongly rejected the US unilateral sanctions on several occasions and use or threat of military option against Iran. However, at the same time, China has blocked Iran from its goal of developing nuclear weapons and supports the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the West Asia region. Some analysts believe that China had been the most low-key participant in the nuclear talks, with its diplomats mainly limited to the side-lines of the negotiations. Although China is seen as sympathetic to Iran, and it has an interest in the stability of the West Asian region. However, China was also very conscious about its economic and political relationship with the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council especially with Saudi Arabia. China is well aware that its economic and political relations with the PGCC are more vital than Iran.

## END NOTES

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