

## GEO POLITICS OF NUCLEAR CALCULUS:

### MIND GAMES IN ASIAN LANDSCAPE

BY

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The legacy to neutralize the unholy afflictions of acquiring nuclear power/WMD by the states with potential of destabilizing the world peace seem to be back on centre stage after a decade plus. Like any other international issue there are divided opinions amongst the powers to be, as regards to the format of structures of nuclear discipline amongst the emerging nuclear entities. Iran and North Korea are the latest objectives of this global exercise with **opinions ranging from managing the capabilities to the desire for a total roll back of their nuclear ambitions.** The opinion differential, obviously, is a function of world view of each member of the 'nuclear Haves group' when hyphenated with their own national interests.

**The debate lies in the realms of freedom of using the nuclear capability for generating clean energy for development on one end, and its use as a weapon to create military deterrence on other extreme.** While the first objective is fully justified on the strength of rationale of human development, it is the weapon part which is needs scrutiny based on assessed intentions of the countries who have nuclear programmes in some form or other.

The picture gets shaded and skewed when viewed from the geo political prism of **the big powers who have assumed the mantle of custodians of the world peace.** They, obviously, do not want to dilute their dominating stature in the world affairs which incidentally is contingent on their strong economy and coercive nuclear military capabilities. Therefore, anyone challenging this domineering position is looked at with suspicion as a potential trouble creator, hence needs to be controlled or finished altogether. Iraq and Libya are such examples in this regards.

The Trump administration has pulled out of the Iranian nuclear deal arrived at in 2015, despite recommendations of European and Chinese co signatories not to do so. Iran on their part has been adhering to all the provisions of the nuclear deal duly supervised under international monitoring mechanism. Hence, there is no case to abrogate the deal which is going on smoothly as per the agreed norms. The reasons, obviously, are other than what meets the eye.

It is quite clear that the **US with her complicity in creating and supporting the Syrian rebels to bring about the regime change has not succeeded due to support of Russia and Iran to the Syrian president Assad.** They know that Russia is here to stay and amenable to negotiated settlement as long as their strategic interests are taken care of, irrespective of future political dispensation in Syria. Moreover, Russia and US are on same page in bringing about reconciliation between the government of Syria and the rebels. It is, therefore, Iran which needs to be neutralized being the key military force coming in the way of geo political interests of the US in West Asian landscape. It is probably this sentiment which has made US to increase the ante by invoking the nuclear calculus to pressurize Iran into political submission.

Besides above, it is also linked to politico –economic interests of all the parties involved in the Syrian crisis. Iran wants to capitalize on religious sectarian opportunism for their economic interests **as they have plans to lay an Iranian gas pipe line via Syria to Europe as against US sponsored Qatar gas pipe line.** Accordingly, the US and her allies are supporting Sunni rebels with an aim of change of Shiite regime in Syria.

The biggest US concern is use of nuclear weapon by Iran against Israel and her allies. The US fears get further pronounced as Iran has been talking about such contingencies during their Cultural Revolution and subsequent consolidation phase. Iranian nuclear capabilities are also looked at from the Shiite advantage over US backed Sunnis in their regional sectarian rivalry.

Realizing the chances of military defeat of the Syrian rebels of strategic consequences, the US has shifted the goal post to nuclear domain with threat of punitive economic sanctions. The Iran, in order to convey a political defiance, has resorted to firing of rockets on Israeli positions on areas occupied by them on the Golan heights. **The message is clear that Iran cannot be ignored when it comes to peace in the West Asia and resolution of the Syrian crisis.**

The Russian interests lie in her geo-political quest to ensure their military presence in the Mediterranean sea which provides them opportunity to dominate axes to Asia, Europe and Africa, besides access to Indian and Atlantic oceans. They also have an aim to occupy the strategic space being vacated by the US once they move out of the region as per their declared draw down plan. This is the reason of their military intervention in the Syrian crisis in September 2015 and they are unlikely to move out from the region. Iran is an ally of Russia and likely to be supported by them all the way including ensuring that the nuclear deal stays intact. Accordingly, **Russia has put their weight behind need to honour the Iran nuclear deal as against US betrayal on this issue.**

The European signatories UK, France and Germany are **keen to resolve the Syrian crisis at the earliest as more than 4.5 million Syrian refugees are economic burden, besides impacting on their cultural and security milieu in a big way.** Moreover, Iranian conduct has been cooperative in the nuclear deal hence ethically there is no reason to derail the deal. China always seem to be exploring politico-economic opportunities, hence have nothing substantial to comment except appeal for a political solution as being voiced by the majority of international community including India.

**The timings of the US pull out from the Iranian nuclear deal has an another important political import when it is hyphenated with the scheduled meeting of Trump and North Korean president kim jong-un at Singapore on 12 June,** precisely a month later from the time US has show cased her unambiguous intentions to nix the nuclear ambitions of Iran. The US has a plan in place with a similar objective as in case of Iran to force North Korea also to roll back their nuclear ambitions. It is obvious that the Trump has given one month time to Kim to take a call on the nuclear issue with his 'take it or leave it' attitude.

The North Korea on 24 May, 2018 is reported to have destroyed their nuclear test facilities as a precursor to the summit between the two presidents. However, **the political unsavorily utterances of senior dignitaries on both the sides in pursuits of creating a position of strength has resulted in cancellation of the 12 May meet at Singapore.** The Koreans seem to be keen to retain their nuclear capability and settle at ban on further nuclear tests in return of economic assistance from the US. The US on other hand is for a total nuclear disarmament of North Korea and has indicated their inclination of regime change, if need be, in a clear and concise manner.

The mind games seem to be played out using Iran as a precedence initially for North Korean consumption, so as to give them time to make up their mind and chose between economic development or destruction. Similarly, now by cancelling the meet with the North Korea, the US has conveyed their seriousness in rolling back nuclear ambitions of both Iran as well as North Korea. The talk of Libyan model is to indicate their political will to achieve their aim come what may, in case these countries continue to defy US dictates.

While doing above, the US seem to have left windows in both the cases for de escalation of their hardened stance, if situation so demands. In case of Iran, other five signatories continue to be part of the deal **providing political space for US to agree to rejoin, albeit on modified terms of the deal. It may include cap on Iranian missile programme and other structural changes so as to ensure that Iran does not have nuclear weapon capability.** In case of North Korea, the end objective has been spelled out giving more time to them to soften their approach before the meet between both the presidents is revived as indicated by the Trump himself. **The US leverages on China may well be used to bring the Korean leader to listen to US sensibilities more seriously.**

The world is witnessing the attempts to reset the geo political alignments wherein the US seem to have taken initiative to synergize the world order as per their perspective. Nuclear cleansing of apparently rouge states while using the economic leverages to motivate, or coerce them into submission seem to be the chosen political mechanism.

Iran as well as North Korea are also known to be equally politically stubborn and have potential to defy US dictates as the history goes so far. Hence, it's the question of who blinks first in this politically surcharged mind game. Whatever be the outcome, it would impact the existing political environmental synergies in a big way. India be aware, and work out contingencies to deal with the emerging situations. There are going to be difficult times ahead.

**Disclaimer:** Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.

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