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RESEARCH ARTICLES

✚ **Russo-Iran Relations and their Impact on Middle East**

Waqas Waheed Malik

✚ **Dynamics in Pakistan-India Water Dispute**

Sadaf Sultana

✚ **Indian Nuclear Dream: An Irony**

Saman Choudary



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Russo-Iran Relations and their Impact on Middle East

By: Waqas Waheed Malik

The Iranian president Hassan Rouhani's recent visit to Moscow has marked new heights and unprecedented warmth in Russo-Iranian bilateral relations and their cooperation on international issues specially the issues of peace and stability in the Middle East. Over the past one and a half year, Russia and Iran have entered a new phase of military cooperation unprecedented in their relations since the end of World War II. Following the Russian intervention in Syria, armed forces of both the nations are planning operations and fighting together along with the Syrian government forces to ensure the survival of Bashar al-Assad's government. The deepening Iran-Russia relations are largely fueled by their military cooperation in Syria, a shared vision of the global order, and mutual criticism of Western policy in the Middle East. Tehran is a useful ally to Moscow in a highly unstable region, as it can provide geographical access and politico-sectarian influence over Syrian government and a considerable size of population whereas Moscow offers Tehran critical means of protecting its regional security interests. Given its centrality to the strategic ambitions of both parties the war in Syria looks set to be the crucible of Moscow-Tehran cooperation for time to come.

These deepening ties are manifested through many significant moves where both parties complimented each other over international issues in quite unprecedented way. Russian diplomatic play to facilitate Iran over nuclear talks and subsequent conclusion of nuclear agreement between Iran and P5, Russian backing of Iranian inclusion into Astana talks and delivery of Russian S 300 air defence system to Iran were significant steps taken by Russia. In response to that Iran extended its nuclear cooperation with

Russia, welcomed Russian intervention in Syria and in a very surprising move Iran extended its soil for logistic support of Russian operations in Syria. In August 2016, Russia began sending a wave of strategic bombers into Syria from an Iranian airbase. Adding to that during Rouhani's recent visit to Russia, Iran's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said his country will allow Russia to use its military bases to launch airstrikes against militants in Syria. This caught the world's attention and sent a bold signal to the West that both were committed to safeguarding their interests in Syria. Prior to this, Rouhani and Putin have held eight meetings over the past four years. The two presidents have also held several phone conversations and discussed the available avenues for the continuation of bilateral cooperation on the crisis in Syria and the fight against international terrorism.

This closeness between Moscow and Tehran especially in Syria has already had serious consequences for Europe. It has strengthened Assad's hand, and further marginalized Europe on the diplomatic track. Though West has raised question marks about the durability of the relationship but it also finds it convincing that this unexpected closeness can signify a sustainable strategic alliance that will reshape the geopolitics of the wider Middle East as Moscow and Tehran are comfortable with each other's ideological outlook. Russia does not find the ideological underpinning of the Iranian leadership to be alien or threatening, as the West does, but instead sees it as something vaguely familiar. The Russians are not inclined to over-interpret the ideological differences and they know how to find ways around them. In turn, Iran views the Kremlin's position as an indication of Moscow's foreign policy pragmatism and avoidance of the type of strategic blindness that has tainted a highly politicized Western outlook on the Islamic Republic.

The commonalities in their approach to international relations have greatly influenced the Russian as well as the Iranian approach to the Syrian crisis. Iran has sought to secure its pan-regional interests, which it feels have been undermined by US actions across the Middle East, most recently in Syria. Tehran also has a sense of pride regarding its military cooperation with Moscow, which is the first example of its kind since the

Shah's rule and which has emboldened Iran's sense of confidence in its regional foreign policy. On the other hand Russia's engagement in Syria is inspired by its desire to "prevent the collapse of another state" and secondarily to preserve its position in the region. The measures in Syria are intended to prevent Western-backed regime change and possibly also to teach the US a lesson by showing how one "really needs to fix such situations" by supporting a strongman, not "democracy". Moreover the Syrian conflict has provided the opportunity for Russia and Iran to put their newly aligned world outlook to the test with the aim of preserving their respective interests at a time when Damascus is at its weakest. This Russian Iranian cooperation has yielded some wonderful outcomes for both Iran and Russia. Iran's confident re-entry into International politics after nuclear deal, Russian dominant rather dictating position in Syria and Assad's survival and resurgence against the will of West and their Arab allies can be attributed to successful international collaboration between the two. On the other hand bilateral relations also got strengthened not only in security cooperation but also in economy, trade, investment cooperation, and large scale infrastructure and energy projects.

Dynamics in Pakistan-India Water Dispute

By: Sadaf Sultana

The clash between India and Pakistan on water is getting more complicated with the passage of time due to their political and strategic rivalry in the region. This dispute started soon after the division of subcontinent in 1947 and until the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), informal provisions were formulated to share east and west flowing rivers. On 19 September 1960, the Indus Water Treaty was negotiated by World Bank (WB) and signed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Ayub Khan. Under this treaty, control over three eastern rivers, Beas, Ravi and Sutlej, were given to India while western rivers, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum were specified to Pakistan. But controversy was created on how the waters were to be shared. Pakistan's rivers flow through India first, and the treaty allowed India to use them for irrigation, transport and power generation. Since the

Source Rivers of the Indus basin were in India, it could potentially create droughts and famines in Pakistan, especially at times of crisis.

The latest disagreement between India and Pakistan is about two hydroelectric power plants, which India is building on the Indus River system. These projects are 330 MWs Kishanganga hydroelectric project and 850 MWs Ratle hydroelectric project in occupied Jammu & Kashmir. Pakistan has very serious reservations on these developments as it clearly violated the design parameters of the IWT that provides specific criteria for such plants. The treaty requires annual meetings but none has been held since May 2015 because of tense relations between both countries. Therefore, Pakistani and Indian experts held a round table talks on 20-21 March 2017, in Islamabad which was mainly focused on three Indian projects for generating hydroelectric power on the Neelum and Jhelum rivers. The Indian delegation has assured Pakistan to consider its apprehensions related to these hydropower projects.

Understanding the prominence of Indus Water Treaty, United States has intervened at the highest level to peacefully resolve the current water dispute between India and Pakistan. In December 2016, United Secretary of State talked to Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and indicated that U.S. is aware of Pakistan's objection against India's alleged desecration of Indus Water Treaty. He discussed different options for a cordial and harmonious solution of the dispute. U.S. administration also shared this matter with the World Bank because of the fear that, if hauled, it will harm the treaty that has effectively resolved water dispute between India and Pakistan for more than a half century. In this regard, a secretary level talk will be held in Washington over the controversial issue in April 2017.

Pakistan had continuously been struggling to retain the talk's process in the light of the Indus Water agreement but India was not persuaded to keep the ball rolling for the peaceful settlement of the dispute. India is constantly constructing reservoir and fully consuming the water shortage capacity by manipulating water flows into Pakistan, which poses a serious threat to Pakistan. India has not shared any design of these projects

with Pakistan, which is a clear violation of the treaty and not considering Pakistan's apprehension seriously in this regard. Therefore, both states have commenced separate processes in the World Bank under the Indus Water Treaty. Due to India's inflexible attitude, Pakistan has called for the nomination of the chairman of the International Court of Arbitration (ICA) as Pakistan is quite consistent that implementation and safeguard of this treaty is in the bilateral interest while India has demanded for the appointment of neutral experts for the resolution of dispute. World Bank has an important role in establishment of the Court of Arbitration, hence, Pakistan has also requested World Bank for Arbitration of Article XI of the Indus Water Treaty. This article deals with arbitration of disputes between both the courtiers concerning the interpretation or application of the treaty. Now it is necessary for the WB to maintain its role and not back off, as its arbitration role is most significant because it is legally binding instead of appointment of neutral expert.

The Indus Water dispute has adversely affected both countries and can be degenerated into nuclear conflict. To mitigate the threats caused due to conflict it is very important to take effective measures, such as dialogue or mediation, to prevent the further escalation. India should follow the rules and regulations of the treaty and prevent irresponsible behavior for the peace and stability of region.

Indian Nuclear Dream: An Irony

By: Saman Choudary

In the 21st century, competition among nuclear powers is becoming more and more intense and states are striving for gaining regional dominance. In this pursuit, India is continuously violating the nuclear non-proliferation regime after its so-called peaceful nuclear weapons test being conducted in 1974. Not surprisingly, India is pushing the nuclear arms race further as compared to other regional players that include Pakistan or China, given the fact that the probability ration of Missile tests is 3:1/1, respectively. Alarmingly, India is moving in an ascending trajectory in terms of missile development as India is planning to increase its

missile production capacity rate to 100 per month which is currently 50-60 indigenously-developed Akash missiles per month.

India is rapidly fueling its nuclear weapons program with the help of its strategic allies and is further pursuing to sign new nuclear deals. On the other hand, India has also made a bid for NSG membership in order to become an active partner in technology transfer. However attention is needed to be paid towards Indian non-proliferation and safety record. India never follows through its commitments and has a very poor nuclear safety and security record. It is ironic that major world powers are supporting India in achieving its nuclear dream while ignoring the harsh reality of nuclear safety and security situation in Indian nuclear power plants.

Up till now, Indian nuclear power plants have been breached several times followed by significant nuclear radiation accidents. India has failed to actively follow IAEA safeguards and very poor safety situation exists at both civil and military nuclear power installations. The lack of safety provisions is significantly exposing Indian population to nuclear radiations that are residing inside the nuclear power plant villages. Major diseases that are affecting the exposed population are cancer, cataract, TB, ulcer, infertility and mental retardation. Since 1999, there has been a sharp increase in number of nuclear radiation accidents that are not reported intentionally thereby resulting into ignorance of this issue. The Indian Government do not release any information regarding the leakage accidents whether it be of radioactive water or uranium mines. It is needed to understand that the leakage accidents contaminate the entire ecosystem including, water bodies, flora and fauna, atmosphere, and, land.

The nuclear radiations are causing deleterious impact on human health and generations over generation are getting affected due to genetic mutations causing birth defects and hereditary illness. Kalpakkam, Jadugoda, Pokhran, Tarapur, Kota, and, Bulandshahr are the main areas that are affected by these kind of accidents that has spread long-lived radiation contamination into the ecosystem, which is permanent and

irreversible. This contamination is a slow killer that kills over generations as the inhabitants of these areas are already radiated and nothing can be done about it.

Considering these accidents, it can be noted that there is a continuous chance of accident and radiation leakage that necessitates that Indian Government should take necessary actions to reduce the exposure levels in these areas. International media should bring these accidents to the attention of International community and should create awareness about this worldwide that will surely expose the true face of India. The International community should force Indian government to stop importing further nuclear breeders, to save at least the forthcoming generations. International community should pressurize India to set its nuclear safety and security record straight before further moving on to establishing new partnerships.

